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The Middle English Love Lyric

by

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To Mears

and Dey and Candie

and Fletch and Drain and Dori

with love

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INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the body of love lyrics in Middle English from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries both collectively, in terms of historical development in technique and theme, and individually, in terms of the means by which we make aesthetic judgments about poetry. These two views--one general and collective, the other specific and individual--are not separate or distinct from one another, but rather are interdependent. A study of the technical and thematic developments over time in a particular body of poetry will by necessity incorporate aesthetic considerations as well; and an examination of the means by which we judge poetry to be good or bad will in a like manner include a historical awareness or consciousness.

In order to be more fully aware of the collective implications of these lyrics, we need to familiarize ourselves with the tradition from which they sprang. In accordance with this need, chapter I of this thesis will focus upon the precursors of the Middle English love lyric: the works of the Goliards, the troubadours, the trouvères, and the heritage of the lost native English tradition. Chapter I, then, will familiarize us with possibilities for the love lyric and will sketch in for us the framework upon which the body of poetry with which we are more directly concerned is built.

In chapters II and III, we will see what the medieval English love poets made of the possibilities left them by their continental predecessors. And, too, we will judge them for it. Thus our collective, historical interest folds in upon our individual, aesthetic one. The two go hand in hand, as we will discover in these later chapters.

Having outlined the overriding methodology of this thesis, there are still some brief clarifying remarks that need be made before we move on to the task at hand. These remarks concern two choices made at the very outset of this thesis; choices, that is, that set up the fundamental assumptions under which this paper will be written. Both of these choices have to do with the actual subject matter we will be considering. First of all, the choice was made to consider medieval poems, but more specifically, medieval lyric poems. Since the term "lyric" is a slippery one, having run the gamut of meanings throughout different periods, and since its definition is vital to this paper, which is, as was stated, about lyrics, we must establish what we mean by "lyric" poetry before we go any further.

Originally, the term was used by the Greeks to distinguish a song sung by a single poet to the accompaniment of a lyre.[1] Songs sung by a group, or chorus, were labelled choric. While our modern definition maintains this element of musicality, the "single singer" criterion has disappeared, and a new criterion has developed, that of the subjectivity inherent in lyric poems. These two elements, then, music and personal expression, are the common denominators of lyric poetry. This definition is stated most clearly in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics:

> In its modern meaning, a lyric is a type of poetry which is mechanically representational of a musical architecture and which is thematically representational of the poet's sensibility as evidenced in a fusion of conception and image.[2]

The Encyclopedia's distinction between structure--which is musical--and theme--which is subjective--is a useful one; but, because it is modern, it has only a rough applicability to the poems we will later be discussing. Many of them are based on musical patterns--indeed, many were originally meant to be sung, not read or recited--and many of them exhibit what could be called subjectivity of expression, but not to the extent that our modern conception of the term

"lyric" demands. Still, the Encyclopedia's definition does give us some concrete guidelines, however wary of them we must ultimately be, that can in some way direct us when we look at and choose among Middle English poems about love.

The second choice that was made narrowed our subject matter even more. In chapters II and III, we will concentrate on Middle English lyrics, of course, but more specifically, our study will be of the exceptional ones. The justification for a choice like this must rest ultimately in my own, the author's, consciousness, but this is not purely as subjective and as personal a thing as it may at first appear. Granted, I will make the initial judgment, based, I suppose, as Dr. Johnson says, upon "the nameless and inexplicable elegancies which appeal wholly to the fancy;"[3] however, I have made it my task, and the task of this paper, to ground firmly these initial judgments, to make them as objective as possible, to, in Johnson's words again, "distinguish those means of pleasing which depend upon known causes and rational deduction"[4] from those which depend upon the whims of my own "fancy." I will give reasons, in other words, for my opinions in order to make them as accessible as possible.

Having thus outlined the mechanics and identified the assumptions of this paper, we are at last ready to move on to the lyrics themselves. We must, however, pause one more time along the way and take a look at their ancestors, the twelfth-century love poems of the continent.

FOOTNOTES TO INTRODUCTION

[1]C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1972), p. 298.

[2]Alex Preminger, ed., Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 462.

[3]Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, No. 92, as quoted in Christopher Ricks, Poems and Critics (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 9.

[4]Ibid., p. 9.

CHAPTER I

Looking Back

The Twelfth Century

Based on the surge of intellectual activity which marks it, the twelfth century in Europe has often been classified a renaissance. As any history text will reveal, the twelfth century was the age of the building of the great cathedrals, the founding of the great universities, the advances in thought which prepared the way for the great philosophers of the next century, and, most important for our purposes, the flowering of the vernacular literatures.[1] There have been many conjectures as to the situations or attitudes which inspired, in the twelfth century, the simultaneous and rampant creation of lyric poetry which dealt, many times in the same way, with springtime and love. One can choose from a spectrum of learned opinions: C. S. Lewis simply states that the overwhelming interest in love just suddenly appears;[2] Maurice Valency traces the idea back to Arabic Spain;[3] Peter Dronke claims the passion for love is no new twelfth-century phenomenon, but exists at any time or any place.[4]

Whatever its origins, though, we are more interested in examining the nature of the love phenomenon once it appears. We cannot help but be struck by not only the widespread composition of love lyrics, but also the widespread use of identical themes, phrases, and images. And striking, too, are the paradoxical uniqueness and originality these lyrics obtain despite their dependence upon a common stock of imagery and idea. As we look at Goliard and French love lyrics, it is important to keep this paradox in mind; we will find it at work again when we examine the English lyrics of the next century.

The Goliardic Tradition

Goliardic verse is the sometimes crude and scurrilous, sometimes eloquent and refined poetry ascribed in part to vagrant scholars and clerics who had abandoned the university or cloister for wayfaring life. Vagrant monks had long been one of the Church's troubles, but when, in the twelfth century, the universities came into being and crowds of dissatisfied students joined their ranks,[5] the trouble snowballed into a real problem. What most offended the Church was not so much the desertion of her clerics, but rather the vagrant clerics' satirical, worldly poetry. And this kind of poetry even prominent churchmen or teachers--men like Walter of Châtillon, Hugo of Orleans, perhaps even Peter Abelard--were guilty of. Goliardic poets included men of all ranks; various, too, notes Whicher in The Goliard Poets, were the poems they composed. There were poems attacking the corruption and greed of both the secular and regular clergy, poems praising the delights of food and wine, and, perhaps most characteristic of Goliard poetry, poems dealing simply and sensuously with the delights of the wandering life.[6] It is with this aspect of Goliardic verse that we are concerned, for in this third category we find examples of the springtime and love lyrics that so pervaded the twelfth century.

Levis Exsurgit Zephirus[7] is a simple example of this type. Written in short quatrains of accentual iambic tetrameter and simple rhyme, the poem in its Latin original[8] can be as easily sung as recited. The English version, while attempting to mimic the Latin rhyme scheme, nevertheless loses much of the singsong lightness and gaiety of its Latin archetype. This lively quality of rhyme and meter enhances what is being said in the poem's first three stanzas, in which spring's joyful return to the earth is described. The warm west wind, along with the sun, revives the earth after winter's icy invasion, causing Earth to "bare her bosom" and give forth her

fruits (1.3)[9] once again. Spring is portrayed as a monarch, garbed in robes of purple, who, after a long absence, returns to his kingdom "to scatter flowers about the land/And bid the leaves in woods expand" (1.7-8). As the woods and meadows blossom again with new life, the "little beasts" and "sweet birds" (1.9-10), too, begin to make their dens and nests again, shouting "for very lustihood" (1.12). So far, the picture we see is breathless and alive with new life and joy; however, with the introduction of the female narrator in stanza four, another note, quite different in tone, is struck.

In contrast to the brightness and gaiety of all creation in the spring, the woman speaker is mournful and despairing. We are not prepared for her sad tears in stanza four; the poet fools us into expecting her to be yet another example of spring's merry reappearance. The surprise comes in the last two lines of the fourth stanza. She tells us she sees nature's rebirth, and hears all creation's joyful cries, "and yet the happiest notes they sing/Set her lips to quivering" (1.15-16). She has not been observing and partaking in nature's rejuvenation as we are at first led to believe, but rather "musing all alone" with pale cheeks, deaf ears, and bleary eyes which hear and see no thing (1.17-20). In the final stanza, we hear her poignant prayer that spring hear her and "bless whatever quickens here" (1.22); as for her, she asks to be left alone in her despair, for she "wearies of the light" (1.24). The shocking contrast between the first and last three stanzas of the poem is made even more explicit by her prayer. She herself calls attention to her obliviousness to the joy and life of everything around her. And while the lively, singsong rhythm we noted before persists to the poem's end, in these last three stanzas its light, gay quality serves only to emphasize the contrast between the woman and her surroundings. The

lively rhythm, like the rejuvenated woods and beasts, surrounds the woman but does not draw her in. She remains strangely isolated, alone with her troubles, throughout the poem.

We are never told the cause of the woman's despair, but it seems likely that, as springtime and love go hand and hand in the middle ages just as they do today, she is mourning an unrequited or prematurely lost love. This would explain her wish that spring, which is associated with fertility, which is in turn associated in the animal world with choosing a mate and in the human world with love, "keep leaves and flowers and grass from blight" (l.23) but leave her alone. Leaves, flowers and grass have been reborn; they have made the world fertile and fresh again. Spring should protect them, and all things natural that "quicken here" (l.22), because these things are a part of spring, they are evidence of spring's potency and power. The despairing woman, however, is evidence of spring's destroyer, winter, in her marble coldness (l.18) and insensibility to the life burgeoning around her.

In another poem, Importuna Veneri, p.129, the association of spring and love, and its counterpart, winter and despair, is much more explicit. This poem was written by Walter of Châtillon, a prominent churchman. He treats a theme certainly not in keeping with a cleric's vow of chastity, for in this poem, the return of winter is described by a narrator tormented by love. Again, as in Levis Exsurgit Zephirus, the poem revolves around a contrast between the natural and the human state. Wintry blasts of sleet, ice, and snow have inundated the earth, impeding the toils of love (l.1-4). Like the earth around him, the narrator's face too is frozen and stiff "with an old scar" (l.5-6 in the Latin version). But even as winter rages, the speaker burns with love: "Such love in my breast that I/when winter is

most frigid, fry." (l. 7-8).

This juxtaposition of outside with inside continues. Even as the narrator's skin draws tight with gooseflesh (l.9), his heart and soul are on fire with love. He is tortured during the day and left sleepless during the night (l.3-4); he fears "grievous consequences" (l.6 in Latin version) if this kind of existence persists. Again, he sums up his helpless state with the same two-line refrain: "Such love is in my breast that I/when winter is most frigid, fry."

The last two stanzas examine more closely the paradoxical potency of Cupid's power even while winter destroys all evidence of it in nature. "The harshness of cold does not rout cruel you" (l.5-6 in Latin version), states the narrator, and again the last two lines repeat the paradoxical refrain we have noted before. The narrator's obsessive insistence upon love's contrariety, its refusal to be bound by the laws of nature, reminds us of the woman's despair in Levis Exsurgit Zephirus. In both cases, the human situation is at odds with the natural situation surrounding it. In the first poem, nature is blooming with the life-giving breath of spring while the woman withers under the cold frost of despair; in this poem, nature is blasted by winter's ice while the man burns with the persistent fire of love. And both narrators call attention to their unnatural situations. Both seem to assume that man's state should by rights be in conjunction with nature's or unhappiness and sorrow will result. Indeed, the narrator of Importuna Veneri stresses explicitly the influence of the natural state upon the human one when he observes that "the elements produce moods with their changes" (l.25-26 in Latin version). This assumption that natural and human life are so directly related that any severance of the two results in a limbo of despair and misery is an important one to remember as we move on

to discuss French and then English lyrics. We will ultimately see that this idea of man as naturally a microcosm of the larger macrocosm is so common as to defy any label more specific than just "medieval."

Ver Redit Optatum, p.203, a poem from the Carmina Burana, deals again with the coming of spring, but this time all is in order--both microcosm and macrocosm. Far from being a lament on a lost or painful love affair, this poem is a simple expression of the joy of all creation in the spring. Clad in purple blossoms, the long-awaited spring returns. The forest and its denizens come to life again (l.5-7 in Latin version) "cum gaudio"--"with joy." And, in contrast to the two poems we have already looked at, this joy extends to the human population as well. Young men, gathering flowers and refreshing themselves with perfume, are greeted by young maidens; together they wander through the blossoming meadows "growing fonder indiscreetly" (l.17-18). The spirit of spring is complete in this poem, as the last line of the first stanza emphasizes: "Trees renew their youth now,/Song brings joy in truth now/O completely." Ver Redit Optatum is a pure expression of joy, youth, and life. The playful indiscretions of the young people are as natural and inevitable as new buds in the spring; all of creation, as is right, celebrates winter's banishment together.

In Veris Dulcis in Tempore, p.211, the inevitable alliance between the natural and the human state is stressed again. The poem begins in narrative fashion, with Juliana and her sister "marveling to see the fruit trees blossoming" (l.2-3). The narrator then goes on to point out that just as spring brings about the blossoming of the trees and the "lascivious singing" (l.8 in Latin version) of the birds, so, too, does it just as inevitably cause young girls to melt with "sweet, sweet love" (l.10). Just as the lilies bloom in clusters, so too do "ranks of girls" (l.12 in Latin version) sing

praises to the highest god, Cupid. Finally, the narrator tells us about himself--he wishes he could hold "her whom I chase" (l.15 in Latin version) and kiss her. "What joy to kiss her face" (l.17), he cries; and again, a feeling of joy pervades the poem. As we have seen before, love and embraces are seen to be as wholesome and natural as the spring itself; the refrain stresses this idea by making the absence of love a state almost criminal--at any rate, a thing past thinking of: "Sweet, sweet love/To miss thee now would be a thing/Past thinking of."

Although our selection is limited, we have seen enough to realize that poems about the return of spring were a popular feature of Goliard repertories. So, too, were carpe diem poems advising young people to take advantage of their youth. Omittamus Studia, p.177, seems to be addressed especially to young students. The poet urges them to lay aside their studies and leave it to old men to ponder and advise (l.1-6). The refrain is a pure expression of carpe diem, modified for students:

> Swift age, it overtakes us
> While study holds us down;
> It's young blood that makes us
> Frolic through the town.

The poet goes on to describe the horrifying symptoms of approaching old age--troubles assail one, sorrows dull the mind, the heart slows, the blood chills, and youthful joys yield to sickness and finally death. An interesting comparison, conventional since classical times, is made just before this catalogue of evils begins in stanza two: "when spring starts to fail us/Is winter far behind?" (l.11-12). In these lines, youth and spring are interchangeable terms, as are old age and winter. Again, we see this natural assumption that human life mimics the cycle of the seasons.

Merely persuasive in the first two stanzas, the poet becomes adamant in stanza three. He commands the young to "live like immortals" (l.19), and

give in to their passions and desires. He concludes his advice by practicing what he has preached; he goes out to see a street carnival featuring dancing girls. The ingenious methods used to convince his audience to "seize the day" mark the poet himself as a student. He has learned his rhetoric well, although he now turns it against the very institutions that taught him its use. What makes the poem even more interesting, though, is the recurrence of that same idea we saw in the spring poems: man is a microcosm of the universe around him. Just as the seasons ebb from spring to winter, so too does he. His existence is patterned after a larger one.

Laboris Remedium, p. 217, expresses a philosophy as well, and one that we recognize more commonly as typical of the metaphysical poets in England. The poet is in love with a girl he chose while she was still "in tender youth" (l.8), still a bud he dared not pluck (l.10-11). Now he is separated from her, and his absence is made bearable only by his memories of her. In his absence, however, she has "ripened as the fruits of summer swell" (l.21-22), causing his innocent love for her to ripen as well. "Therefore with joined minds/Let us be joined in works" (l.25-26 in Latin version), he states. The bud has become a flower ready to be plucked (l.29-30). The poet's insistence on a marriage of the mind to accompany a marriage of the body, his stress, in other words, on an intellectual relationship between his mistress and him, is a striking development in terms of the attitudes towards love we have seen expressed; a development, moreover, that becomes sharper and more fully rounded out in the lyrics of the Renaissance and 17th century in England. And again, his ready comparison of his mistress to a flower has implications we have already explored--the poet takes for granted that the human and natural states mimic one another.

Another motif that we commonly find in Goliardic verse (and for that matter, in classical poetry as well), that of a catalogued description of

a mistress' beauty, commonly appears in the Renaissance and beyond as well. In Tempus Est Iucundum, p.219, the poet urges bachelors and maidens to take advantage of springtime, "the time for pleasure" (l.1), and indulge in love's delights. This idea, too, is a common one. But stanza three, in which the poet calls his mistress "the flower of maidens" (l.9) and "the rose of roses" (l.11), introduces a pattern we have not yet discussed. This pattern is expanded more fully in another poem, Salve Ver Optatum, p.207. In this poem the "catalogue of delights" reaches limits we commonly ascribe to English poets of the Renaissance.

In Salve Ver Optatum, the poet lists the various features which comprise his mistress' beauty. Her hair is like gold (l.34), her brow is like a crown (l.39), in her glance is smoldering fire (l.40), her eyebrows are dark and curved like a bow (l.41-42), her cheeks are snowy white yet tinged with a rosy blush (l.43-44), her lips are like red rubies (l.49), her teeth shine (l.51), her figure is slim and her fingers tapering (l.53), and her throat is long and paper-white (l.54). All in all, she is godlike perfection given human form. In this poem, though, such high-flown description somehow does not seem so false and out of place as it does later when the English poets of the Renaissance so overuse the catalogue of delights that it becomes mere dead, glittering ornament. The Goliard poet has prepared the way for his mistress' eloquent description from the poem's beginning. For the first two stanzas, spring's return to the land is described just as richly: the earth is pink with blossom (l.15), greenness spreads like gossamer over the meadows (l.16-17), and Nature's veins throb with growing pains (l.20-21), and trickle with drops of nectar (l.26). Such ornate language and imagery make the mistress' description seem simple and natural by comparison! The Goliard poem escapes the deadening effects of overused description and its

resulting artificiality by mere association with the more simple spring and love poems we have already discussed. Salve Ver Optatum does just what these simpler poems do--all describe nature's rebirth and man's participation in it--with the exception that Salve Ver Optatum elevates the whole description to a more ornate sphere of language and imagery. The idea is still the same, and still as simple: man's moods reflect the seasons' cycles. It is this fact that saves Salve Ver Optatum from the fate of similar poems of the English Renaissance.

Another Goliardic convention that has important implications for Middle English lyric poetry is that of the pastoral setting. Exiit Diluculo, p.195, is a simple example of a pastoral poem. The setting is dawn in the country; a farmer's daughter sets forth to tend her sheep carrying a staff and new wool to spin. Her flock is then described: she is in charge of a sheep and an ass, a heifer and bull calf, and a billy and nanny goat. So far, all is rustic innocence. The last stanza, however, tells of her meeting a scholar who is seated on the turf. "What are you doing there, master?" she asks; "Come on and play with me" (l. 11-12 in Latin version). Ludere, to play, also has sexual connotations; the shepherdess is actually inviting the scholar to make love to her. Her bold invitation seems incongruous after the first two stanzas which establish her as a simple, seemingly shy country girl. However, the natural association of youth and love, which was taken for granted in the spring poems we discussed earlier, is assumed in this poem as well. There is no contrast here between innocence and sin; just as the poem's setting is natural in the extreme, so too is its action. The shepherdess' invitation should not shock us. It is as natural and wholesome as the grassy meadow or the grazing flock.

In our selective consideration of Goliardic poetry so far, we have

familiarized ourselves with various conventions or motifs that are important to our eventual understanding of the Middle English lyrics of the next few centuries. The Goliards' conventions are not new; spring openings, the association of human and seasonal cycles, carpe diem expressions, and pastoral settings were traditional even in classical times (Horace's Odes and Ovid's Amores, for example, are filled with such motifs). Rooted in antiquity, too, is the Goliardic penchant for emphatic paradoxical statements such as we find in a poem like Lingua Mendax et Dolosa, p.183. In one passage, the narrator of this poem claims his love for a certain lady will persist "till day breaks in the west/till labor is the same as rest/till forests without trees can thrive/And fire and water cease to strive" (l.37-40). The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics tells that such "until" impossibilities were used to express exaggeration even in ancient Greek and Latin poetry.[10] Perhaps most traditional, however, is the catalogued description of a lady's beauty so common in Goliardic poetry, the pattern for which is found in the medieval handbooks of rhetoric used throughout Europe.[11] The Goliardic conventions, then, are themselves the products of a long tradition; we have listed them merely to establish their continued existence and thus ready availability to the English poets of the following centuries.

Our work so far has thus been of a practical nature. We are merely piecing together the framework, of which Goliardic poetry is only a part, which existed prior to the appearance of the first Middle English lyrics. With a consideration of troubadour and trouvère lyrics, and with certain hypotheses about the lost native English verse of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, our framework will be complete. Only then will we be able to determine the significance of the framework itself, how it lends substance and support to the body of Middle English lyrics built upon it.

The French Tradition: The Troubadours

While the Goliards were busily composing their verse, another group of lyric poets was becoming popular among the aristocracy of southern France. These poets, the troubadours, wrote a highly stylized kind of poetry intended for presentation at court. Like the Goliards, the troubadours wrote poems of satire and criticism, and too, poems about love. Troubadour love poetry, however, is quite different from the love poems of the Goliards; the troubadours described in their poetry a kind of love that came to be known as amour courtois or courtly love. We have seen how the Goliards viewed love as a natural phenomenon as inevitable as the changing of the seasons; we have seen, too, the for the most part unsophisticated simplicity of the lovers in Goliard poems (perhaps the mistress described so exquisitely in Salve Ver Optatum is an exception). Courtly love, however, developed new roles for the lover and his mistress. The mistress was elevated to an almost divine pedestal (foreshadowings of which were seen in the elaborate description of the speaker's mistress who becomes an example of near-godlike perfection in Salve Ver Optatum), and only through her grace may the lover win her for his own. The lover is not usually so lucky, however. He spends most of his life in her service, pining away with unrequited passion. The lover is humble, courteous, and almost always abject. He is literally wounded with love and desire, and even though his lady may never return his love, he would rather die than cease admiring her from afar. Finally, although it is not absolutely necessary, the lover's passion for his lady may be adulterous. Medieval marriages were for the most part made for property, not love; courtly love, so overwhelmingly earnest and dedicated, was thus often more in keeping with adultery than with marriage.

Although it does seem unlikely that the troubadours were the first men

in history to think about the commonplace emotion of love in such a refined and elaborate way, the question of courtly love's origins need not concern us. Perhaps the Egyptians did indeed conceive of love in this way, as Dronke claims;[12] undoubtedly the feeling could and can emerge anywhere at any time. As to why the troubadours are responsible for its emergence in southern France in the late eleventh century, who can say? At any rate, we are far more interested in the concept itself, and how the troubadours worked with it in their poetry. For this reason, we turn away from speculation and look instead at the lyrics of the troubadours.

Cercamon's "True love"[13] is a lover's meditation on his loved one. He begins by stating his single-mindedness in loving his mistress, "My thoughts attract on her always" (l.4), even though he is doubtful that his lady "wants to keep me hers" (l.8). The speaker's love is all-encompassing; he vows to "quit all lords and ladies" (l.10) if his mistress desires it, and claims he will "die tonight" (l.13) if he were to be separated from her. "I/place my hope in no other one/sunup, sunset, night or day/my heart dreams no other happiness" (l.13-16), he claims. The lover then goes on to state that no lady can have valor "if the joy of Love blow not within her" (l.23). Love is something precious, something ennobling, in the lover's eyes. Indeed, he says that the only wealth he would ever need is for her to claim him as her lover. His desires would be filled and overflowing if she would grant but one kiss (l.47-50). Not only his state of mind, but too, his whole character would improve with such recognition; he would gain in prowess, valor, and generosity were the lady to return his love--

> How I'd fight then!
> war against any neighbor, give largely,
> make myself feared and known, hunt
> enemies down...
> (l.51-54).

These would be the effects of his lady's recognition; the effects of her scorn, too, would be just as drastic and marked. If the lady keeps him in doubt as to her intentions any longer, he will die in torment (l.38). Clearly, the courtly lover regards love as a serious business. He is willing to forsake all his other friends for her, fight for her, die for her, just for permission to "lie at her feet" (l.24). The speaker in Importuna Veneri, we remember, was tormented by the burning heat of his love; even this, however, in no way approaches the torture felt by the speaker of "True love warms my heart." In Goliard poetry, love is granted as regularly and willingly as the rising of the sun. The contrast between this view of love and the troubadours' is overwhelming. The alliance of the natural and human states, so taken for granted by the Goliards, has been completely severed by the troubadours. Love is no longer easy and natural; the lover must now be willing to die for it.

Although this conception of love has nothing in common with the Goliardic one, the courtly lover's conventional description of his lady's beauty brings several Goliard poems to mind. The speaker of Cercamon's poem calls his mistress more beautiful than "the fairest woman ever to use a mirror" (l.39). She is "soft and white as ermine" (l.40), and fresher than lily or rose" (l.42). This kind of praise was common in Goliard poetry as well, but there we saw how such descriptions, even at their most embellished, seemed somehow to suit the kind of love described. The Goliard lover could not help comparing his mistress to a flower or her cheeks to new snow; she was like these things, as was their whole relationship. Man and nature were one in Goliard poetry; unrequited love may be discussed, as in Levis Exsurgit Zephirus, but such a situation is made to seem unnatural and alien--"a thing past thinking of." The troubadour's

description has the opposite effect. Because his lady is more perfect than nature--fresher than a flower, whiter than ermine--it follows that he cannot hope to attain her. Since the courtly lover's mistress is a near-divine being, unrequited longing on the part of her lover becomes the normal, natural way of loving her. The love relationship, so natural and inevitable in Goliardic thought, becomes supernatural and beyond human reach with the troubadours.

In "When I breathe this air," p.43, the poet meditates, again, on the love he bears his lady, but aside from the usual claims that she alone causes the birth of joy and that the highest praises of her beauty would still not do justice to her, (l.17-21), the poet speaks of his creative powers as flowing from his lady as well. "If I am able to say or do anything well," he says, "It is thanks to her, for it was she/who gave me the knowledge and the understanding/That makes me a poet of love" (l.22-25). This is a new idea in the medieval lyrics we have studied so far, and an important one to remember as we look ahead to the English lyrics to come. The poet as lover owes his poetic abilities to his lady, then (Goldin's translation on p.255, l.27 of Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères states that the inspiration comes specifically from "her beautiful body"); in fact, his poem starts out as a lovely description of Provence:

> When I breathe this air,
> It is the scent of Provence that I bring to my nostrils
> . . . . . .
> For there is no land more lovely
> Than the land which stretches from Vence to the Rhone
> Whose borders are washed by Durance and the sea
> (l.1-2; 8-10).

The joy that the landscape brings him causes his loved one to come to mind, and only then does the poem become another variation on the theme of courtly love. The poet's statement that his poetic creativity comes from his lady

seems to be borne out in his poem. He begins to compose some ordinary verses on Provence, but cannot write about such beauty without thinking of his mistress. Poetry and his loved one have become intertwined for the poet; his poetry ceases to exist without its counterpart and fountainhead, the lady. The poem ends with the poet's realization that "Whatever I do that is beautiful/Is but a reflection of her charm and her beauty" (or, as Goldin would have it, a reflection of her charming and beautiful body).

"I dwell in deep anxiety," p.39, written by a woman, considers the courtly love relationship from the woman's point of view. In this poem, a woman regrets her previous aloofness to a knight who had loved her in courtly fashion. In the courtly love poems written by men, such aloof and disdainful behavior on the part of one's mistress is to be expected and accepted. The woman of this poem, however, regrets her behavior, no matter how common and even rightful it was under the conventions of courtly love. She feels that she deceived herself by not giving in to her knight (l.5-6), and now she grieves in his absence. She longs to embrace him and make him master of her love, heart, senses, and life (l.9-10; 15-17). Oddly enough, this woman has reversed the roles of the courtly love relationship. It is she now, instead of the knight, who longs for a lover, who wants to enslave herself to him, who wishes to kiss her loved one till life ends (l.20). This is a strange twist indeed of the courtly love with which we are familiar. The last four lines of the poem, though, re-establish the relationship on a normal footing. The woman burns with fire to hold her knight in her husband's place (l.21), but only, she adds, if he will swear to do whatever she desires (l.23). In other words, the knight must again become her slave, and the relationship must again resume its typical form. No matter how great her love is for him, she does not intend to abandon the

superior position allotted to her by the conventions of courtly love. More than anything else, this poem, despite its exploration of a woman's feelings about love, stresses the powerlessness and painfulness of the man's position in the courtly love relationship. While the roles are reversed, we see the lady tormented with unrequited love; even then, however, she has the power to turn the relationship around again and once more enslave and dominate the man. Courtly love is an arduous, painful endeavor; if one must engage in such a relationship, far better to hold the woman's customary role as this poem shows.

In addition to introducing a new way of looking at love between a man and woman, the troubadours also developed a new motif with which to talk about the secrecy and danger of this kind of love. Poems featuring this motif were known as albas, or dawn songs. As in the case of the Goliards, however, the dawn song is not the original creation of the troubadours, though they did work with it in original ways. One need only glance at a classical alba, Ovid's Amores I.13 for example, to see the newness of the troubadour approach. Ovid's poem[14] begins in a manner similar to troubadour albas: a lover laments the approach of dawn because it summons his girlfriend from his bed. The initial similarity fades, however, as Ovid continues. His whole attitude is one of amused sarcasm. He pokes fun at Aurora with references to her "withered" (l.39 in Latin version) old husband. Small wonder, says Ovid, if she should be eager to leave his bed. If she were sleeping with beautiful young Cephalus, he notes, she would undoubtedly be tardy in her duties. Playful, too, is Ovid's list of others who dread Dawn's arrival. Not just lovers, but navigators on the sea, weary travelers, hardworking peasants, Senators, lawyers, housewives, soldiers, and schoolchildren also hate the morning light and its summons to duty. Ovid's

teasing does no good, however; the sun comes up as usual and the poem ends. And the inevitable sunrise is really the only thing Ovidian and troubadour albas have in common. The troubadours, so earnest about love, were in the same way much more disturbed by the coming of dawn and the departure of one's lady. In fact, they were horrified at the prospect of morning.

"In an orchard," p.5, is a good example of this kind of horror. A lady and her lover have spent the night together in an orchard. Like Ovid, their bliss ends when the watchman warns them of dawn's approach. There is no playfulness or mockery in their lament, however. The sun is depicted as a malicious "Jealous One" (l.11), who wants only to destroy the lovers' joy. Despite the watchman's repeated warning, "Oh God, Oh God, the dawn! How soon it comes!" the lovers prolong their stay. "Let us kiss once again" (l.9), "let us play one more game" (l.13), the lady insists. The urgency of the watchman's cry breaks in at the end of every stanza, though, and convinces us, if not the lovers, of the danger of being discovered by the "Jealous One." This tension between the peacefulness of the meadow, filled with the singing of the birds at sunrise, and the urgency of the watchman, warning of dawn's approach, makes the troubadour alba a powerful expression of the perils involved in the secret, often adulterous, courtly love relationship. Normally, the coming of dawn means that the dangers of the night are over, and that we have been granted yet another new day to live; while Ovid's dawn song makes no mention of this optimistic fact, it does treat Aurora's arrival in a playful, joking manner. She does not personify disaster and is not characterized as a malicious thief. Rather, Ovid depicts her as a young woman understandably eager to flee the bed of a withered old man. The troubadour alba, by contrast, gives to the dawn perilous and sorrowful connotations, and makes sunrise something to be

dreaded and feared, something hostile to lovers.

"Watchman on the tower," p.40, is an even stronger attack upon the dawn. Again, the lovers regard the sunrise as a personal enemy; the sun is a thief which creeps in, uninvited, to steal the lovers' joy (l.4-6), and a perfidious conspirator who delights in cheating the lovers of their pleasure (l.23-24). But, since the lovers consider the lady's sire more dreadful than even the dawn (l. 15), they heed the watchman's call and bitterly bid each other farewell as the morning breaks.

The lovers of "Heavenly king," p.41, however, do not fear the lady's jealous husband. They have asked a friend to keep watch over them throughout the night and warn them of dawn's approach. The friend complies, yet the lovers, to his dismay, ignore his urgent warnings. In the poem's last stanza, in fact, the lady's lover states that he cares "not a mite/for jealous sire nor dawn" (l.34-35), his delight is so complete. The "gilos" the lover claims he has no fear of translates as "jealous man,"[15] and certainly refers to his lady's husband, not the sun. The pair are thus engaged in adultery. While this situation is by itself neither unusual, nor, taking into consideration the nature of medieval marriages, condemnatory, the audacity of the friend's prayers is both. The friend begs God to "look down with kindly favor" (l.2) upon the lovers, and admits that he has not slept all night but has been "upon his knees" (l.22-23) praying that the Lord protect the pair. The friend must be mad to presume upon the very Being that would be the first to condemn the lovers' adultery. He seems to have been infused with the courtly lover's way of thinking--a way that, given the dogged single-mindedness so characteristic of courtly love in the troubadours, could make love a religion and a mistress a deity. This kind of thinking would allow the friend to see the adulterous couple not

as sinners, but as martyrs persecuted by a satanic husband. It would thus allow him to feel that God was on their side, happy to receive and glad to answer their prayers. If love is blind, courtly love under these circumstances is even blinder. How else could men and women familiar from an early age with the Church and its teachings reconcile lust and adultery to the Christian religion?

Although courtly love, at least the adulterous kind, is an enigma, at least one troubadour also wrote of a kind of love that needs no explanation. Like the Goliardic poets, William IX considers love a natural accompaniment to springtime. The narrator of his poem, "In the fair times of new-born spring," p.10, feels that spring's arrival to the meadows and forests is also a call for him to join the birds and flowers and "greet the new day" (l.3) with his own song. His song takes the form of a poem in honor of his mistress. He pledges his love to her even though their relationship, like the hawthorn tree which is now whipped by winter's sleet and now caressed with spring sun (l.13-18), undergoes its ups and downs. Strengthened by his lady's love, the narrator feels he can withstand all evils--even the gossiping tongues of slanderers (l.25-30). The sentiment expressed in this poem is not the product of a tormented obsessed mind, such as we have seen other troubadours describe; rather, the state of being in love is made natural again. Spring's call to the woods to blossom and to the birds to sing is also a call to young people to love. Not many troubadours wrote so simply and unaffectedly about love.

In the main, the troubadours thought of love as that tormenting, frustrating process of self-purification undergone by so many courtly lovers. There were some troubadours, such as William IX, who regarded love as something simple, inevitable, and natural. And there were still others

who hated secular love altogether, and wrote vehemently against it. Marcabru's poem "Winter goes and weather betters,"[16] is an example of this third way of thinking. Marcabru begins his poem traditionally, with a description of spring and the emotions it inspires in man. The rest of his poem, however, is quite untraditional in its condemnation of most kinds of secular love. Marcabru distinguishes between two kinds of love: amars, or lecherous "Low Loving," and amors, "High" or "Good Love," which, Wilhelm notes, may refer to either the perfected human love found in marriage, to the "good" kind of courtly love that is not adulterous and exists in a refined way between a noble lady and a knight, or to the pure, non-secular, Christian love for God.[17] Throughout the poem, Marcabru associates Low Love with lechery. "Low Loving spreads, confounding/control with gluttonous appetite" (l.19-20); too, it entices a lady to follow "the bitch's instinct" of "the greyhound for the cur" (l.48-49) and make love with her farmhand. Furthermore, Marcabru talks about how Low Loving "spanks his disciples/and sends 'em straight to Hell" (l.30-31). Low Love, then, dooms a man to the fires of Hell.

By contrast, High Love is associated with the Christian virtues of purity and honor; it "packs a panacea/to heal [its] loyal followers" (l.28-29), and whoever has High Love as a neighbor "sees Honor and Worth inclining/and Value" (l.64-67). If Low Love sends its proponents to Hell, it follows that High Love sends its followers to Heaven. The identification of such Christian values with what Marcabru calls High Love leads us to believe that if he includes any kind of extramarital courtly relationship under the label High Love, it is only the most noble and ideal. He certainly does not allow an adulterous relationship to be called High Love--note his condemnation of the noble lady who fornicates with her farmhand, thereby "impeasantizing

his master" (1.63), her husband. By implication, then, Marcabru praises love in marriage and love for God; love outside of marriage is acceptable only in the most elevated and refined of forms.

Marcabru brings to our attention that there are different kinds of courtly love; some are good and some are bad. In a Christian era, adultery is always bad. A self-effacing devotion to God or to a noble lady is good. Throughout the poetry of the troubadours, we have run up against examples of either kind. Whether of a good or bad sort, however, it is the overall tradition of courtly love that interests us, for it adds a whole new set of conventions to the stock already available to medieval poets of love. With that in mind, we turn now to see what the poets of northern France, the trouvères, pulled from this stock.

The French Tradition: The Close of the Twelfth Century

The waning of the twelfth century brought with it the waning and eventual disappearance of Goliard and troubadour poetry alike. The Church had long been displeased with those of its clerics turned Goliardic minstrel; in 1231, she expelled the vagrant cleric from her ranks.[18] Her action had the desired effect. With official censure, the degeneration of Goliardic poetry, whether produced by beggar students and clergy or prominent churchmen, was assured. By the fourteenth century, Miss Waddell notes, the word "Goliard" was the vilest in the language.[19]

The Church's action against the Albigensian heretics from 1208 to 1229[20] had a similar though unintentional effect upon the troubadours. The wars of the Albigensian Crusade disrupted all of southern France. With their courtly audiences displaced and their courts destroyed, the troubadours soon lost their popularity. As the first half of the thirteenth century drew to a close, the troubadours, like the Goliards, were only names from the past.

The mannerisms both had established in their poetry, however, lived on. Even before the Crusade took its toll among the troubadours, their style was being mimicked by their northern countrymen. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, a substantial number of northern French poets were perpetuating the traditions of their Goliardic and troubadour forebears.

The French Tradition: The Trouvères

Although Frederick Goldin in Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères feels that there is a distinctive difference between the lyric poets of the south and those of the north of France, as we read the poetry of each region it is difficult to discern the changes he talks about. Conon de Béthune, for example, writes about typical courtly love situations such as we found in the poetry of the troubadours. In "As truly as she of whom I sing,"[21] Conon writes of a lady who is "worth more than all the good women there are" (l.2). He finds himself speechless in her presence (l.25-29) and, typical again, describes the "great pain" (l.34) he suffers by her disdain. The poet thus identifies himself as the kind of courtly lover we find in troubadour descriptions. Interesting, however, and to some extent innovative, are the comparisons he makes through similes: he says he is like a sick man longing for health (l.7), a teacher of chess who can instruct others yet loses all skill when he plays the game himself (l.21-24), and a champion fighter who forgets what to do with his lance or shield (l.37-40). Conon's use of figurative language adds another dimension to the rather stylized formulaic troubadour evocations of the sufferings of the courtly lover. In particular, his image of the lady as the cure for his "sickness" becomes a common motif in the Middle English lyrics we will later discuss.

Of course, the troubadours made use of figurative language as well,

but Goldin feels that its effect was quite different from effects achieved by the trouvères. The troubadours, finds Goldin, shaped their lyrics in accordance with the tastes of their audiences.[22] They were more interested in entertaining their listeners than in exploring their own feelings through the medium of poetry. For this reason, their lyrics are less artistically self-conscious, more objective in nature; any use of figurative language, the product of the poet's imagination and separate from, even heedless of, that of the audience, is cursory and quickly passed over. The fact that their audiences were the troubadours' benefactors and only means of support adequately explains the troubadour preference for objectivity and entertainment. When the troubadour tradition passes on to northern France, however, Goldin observes that this strict audience-awareness is left behind. No longer bound by the expectations of his listeners, the trouvère poet could deal in what interested him alone. His poems were free to become vehicles for his own private thoughts and feelings. He was free to experiment with more sophisticated figurative language. In short, says Goldin, the new-found subjectivity of the trouvères saved the medieval love lyric from extinction with the rout of the troubadours in 1229.

Goldin's view seems at first strong, since even he notes the persistence of the troubadour method in the works of early trouvères. Like Conon de Béthune, for example, Le Châtelain de Couci writes about courtly love in the manner of the troubadours. "The season when no rose or leaf," p.353, begins with a typical spring opening and records the poet's lament at his lady's rejection of him. Interesting in light of the Middle English lyrics to come, however, is de Couci's personification of Love and Reason. He imagines the two battling for control of his mind, and begs Love to "let Reason lose its influence" till his lady accepts him (l.15-18). Blondel de Nesle, too,

follows closely the tradition of the troubadours. His poems evoke the typical sufferings of the courtly lover, though in certain instances his imagery has an important significance for the study of the later Middle English lyrics. In "If those who wonder," p.367, the poet refers, as did Conon de Béthune, to the healing powers of one's mistress. The narrator of de Nesle's poem claims that if his lady "knew all about my martyrdom and disease" (l.19-20), "she would send relief without delay" (l.23-24). And in "It would be best to stop singing altogether," p.371, the poet adds to a conventional description of his beloved's beauty a reference to the traditional eye-heart psychology of love: "her shining eyes/which know so well how to smile with love/led love into my heart" (l.15-17).

Goldin notes that Gacé Brulé, too, adheres to the themes and techniques of the troubadours. He writes a conventional alba, "When I see daybreak coming on," p.403, which includes a reference, again typical, to the "slanderers" who constantly foil lovers' plans and joy (although it was not mentioned specifically before, the troubadours do indeed constantly refer to "evil tongues" and slanderers who act as informants on courtly lovers; de Couci, too, mentions these slanderers in several of his poems). Conventional, too, is Brulé's "The little birds of my country," p.383, which begins with a typical nature opening, a description of Brittany. As the poet goes on to describe his sufferings at the hand of his disdainful lady, we expect yet another account of the trials and tribulations of the courtly lover. Our expectations are met, yet Brulé envisions his mistress' cruelty in an imaginative way. He speaks metaphorically of his mistress having "stole away" his heart (l.22); he says she took it so gently that he never felt its departure (l.25-27). And while his lady typically takes away his "joy and laughter" and makes him "die of longing" (l.41-42), Brulé's images give

this typical situation an unusually sinister quality. He says his "face is pale and colorless" (l.40) and he has "a crazy look" (l.46) about him; combined with the metaphorical suggestion that she "stole" his heart, it is as if the poet's mistress were a vampire. She certainly has a similar wasting, sapping effect upon her victim.

In other poems, too, Brulé seems to expand upon troubadour conventions. The troubadours often wrote about "false lovers" and the evils they cause to the sacrament of love. In keeping with this tradition, Brulé writes about right and wrong love in "Most have sung of Love," p.385. However, it is almost as if he identifies the troubadours, with their formulaic descriptions of love, with false lovers. Brulé states that "most have sung of Love/as an exercise and insincerely" (l.1-2); the troubadours certainly made an exercise of love at times. Brulé, though, claims that he will not be so hypocritical, and goes on to list the qualities of a true lover: he must have a loyal heart (l.9), be satisfied with whatever his lady permits (l.16), be willing to suffer and wait (l.26), and beg for mercy openly (l.28). While the troubadours described the courtly lover in a similar way, they did tend to make love an exercise, a trial for him. It is this idea that Brulé finds fault with and calls false.

Again, in "No green Thing, no meadow," p.391, Brulé discusses true and false kinds of love. He claims that "those who never loved a lady/always set their songs in spring/then they complain, without suffering" (l.6-8). Complaints without true passion behind them are mere formal exercises in writing; they are not evocations of real feeling. Brulé's distinction between poems that are written as objective exercises and those that are spawned in the poet's innermost soul lends credence to Goldin's contention about the difference between troubadour and trouvère. Of course, Brulé does

not specifically name his troubadour predecessors as authors of "exercises" or "songs set in springtime" (in fact he groups the guilty parties under the heading of "slandering spies," l.37, or "empty, lying lovers," l.10), but we know enough about the troubadours' style of writing to feel that they are at times guilty of what Brulé condemns.

Colin Muset, too, adheres to conventional themes and techniques but these conventions are not drawn so much from the formulaic courtly love described by the troubadours as from the simpler, more rustic love adventures described in their pastourelles or chansons d'aventure. "Would you like to hear the muse of Muset," p.417, belongs to the chanson d'aventure tradition in that it describes the poet's rendezvous with a pretty girl in the country. He plays to her on his fiddle and is rewarded with a kiss and "another thing which she gave me as her friend" (l.45-46). Conventional too, is his description of her charms. His praise of the good life he leads, filled with girls and wine, is traditional as well, but more along Goliardic than troubadour lines.

While Muset wrote several of these chansons d'aventure, he did too, like the troubadours, compose lyrics in the courtly love tradition--"Dear Colin Muset," p.423, is a debate about true and false love, and "When I see the sweet season returning," p.431, features a conventional spring opening before going on to describe the pains of a courtly lover. In "I am surprised by this sweet love," p.435, however, he seems to merge the two sets of conventions. In this poem, he writes of his longing for a beautiful girl in the manner of a troubadour courtly lover: he can think of nothing but her (l.24), feels he must die for love (l.27), and claims he will never know joy again unless she reciprocates his love (l.47-48). His catalogue of the maiden's charms derives from the courtly love poems of the troubadours as

well; the nature of this catalogue, however, comes from the conventions of pastourelle or chanson d'aventure. The girl is crowned with a garland of gold (l.13) and garbed in a girdle of silk (l.19). Her body is "all radiant" and "full of light" (l.21-22) and shines like a dream or the morning star (l.39-40). The poet gazes upon her as she sits in an orchard, beside a rosebush (l.31;37), but she bewitches him somehow and escapes before he can touch her. The girl is quite unlike the conventional mistress of the troubadour courtly love lyrics; while both the courtly mistress and Muset's maiden are given supernatural qualities, the maiden resembles a nymph or a fairy more than a divine goddess on a pedestal. Indeed, the poet admits he "thought she was a fairy" (l.50). In this imaginative way, Muset combines courtly with popular tradition.

So far, then, we have seen some indications of Goldin's distinction between troubadour and trouvère; the trouvères' innovative use of imagery does seem to express individual rather than communal interests. But in all the northern poets we have discussed, innovation is definitely obscured overall by the persistence of troubadour courtly love conventions. If formula and exercise are indeed dropping out of the love lyric with the trouvères, it is a slow and gradual process. There are occasional glimpses of subjectivity and personal expression, but for the most part the objective awareness of the troubadours persists. However, one trouvère seems to have gone further than his fellows in the direction Goldin describes. Thibaut de Champagne employs figurative language to an extent not yet seen in the trouvères. "From true love come wisdom and goodness," p.455, is an interesting though traditional delineation of love and its companions; wisdom, goodness, fear, and bravery. Conventional, too, is the description of love's progress from a lady's eyes to a lover's heart. But Thibaut carries this metaphor to an extent uncommon in troubadour and most trouvère poetry.

The poet describes his lady's eyes as striking him gently and leaving a fresh wound in his heart (l.30-32). He says that only the lady can cure the wound, and even she could only remove the shaft (l.37-38). "She cannot draw out the iron point," he says, "for that broke off inside my heart when the arrow struck" (l.39-40). Thibaut's vivid depiction of a timeworn device is unique. While thus adhering to a convention he at the same time remodels it to suit his own, individual purposes.

In the same way Thibaut reworks the commonplace disdain and scorn of the courtly lover's mistress in "It is common for a man who holds a prisoner," p.463. As is typical, he writes about a mistress so cruel that she refuses even to let her admirer speak; different, however is the metaphor used to depict the mistress' cruelty. The poet compares his heartless lady to a jailer who holds a man prisoner and makes use of his acknowledged power by refusing "even to listen to him speak" (l.2). The narrator expands the metaphor again and again, stating that he does not dare speak to his lady about "ransom" or being "freed for hostages," and realizing that he cannot "escape this prison" (l.6-8). The prison image is continued as the poet claims to have "a bit of refuge" in hope (l.30); sadly he realizes that, just like a bird eager for any available shelter, he has hurtled right into a trap (l.31-32).

Thibaut works with the prison image again in another poem, "I am like the unicorn," p.467. He carries it to even greater lengths as he allegorically describes falling in love:

> Then I was led without ransom
> into sweet captivity in prison
> where the pillars are made of Desire
> the gates of Pleasant Sight
> the chains of Good Hope
> Love holds the key to the prison
> and has set three watchmen there
> (l.14-20).

The allegory persists as the poet names the three watchmen; the first is Kindly Look, the second Beauty, and the third Rejection, "a dirty, cruel, vulgar, stinking, vicious scoundrel" (1.24-25) who stands at the outer gate. Changing metaphors, the poet also likens himself to the unsuspecting unicorn, who falls faint into a virgin's lap only to be killed by wily hunters (1.1-6). Such detailed reworking makes new a situation otherwise common and conventional.

The metaphorically innovative poems of Thibaut de Champagne, then, provide substantial evidence for Goldin's argument. While the trouvères for the most part were perpetuators of troubadour tradition, one can see an increased though sporadic interest in the development of a poetic imagination. In general, Goldin's observations are valid. Although buried beneath a welter of troubadour convention, there is in the trouvères the first spark of subjectivity, of individuality in expression. Without Goldin's helpful forewarning, however, we may have been a long time picking it out.

However obscure this new development, we must be aware of its genesis in the lyrics of the trouvères since their heritage does form part of the framework upon which the later Middle English lyrics are built. Furthermore, because the trouvères in the main outlasted the Goliards and the troubadours, there are those who would claim that their tradition was the only one which could have been passed along to the Middle English lyric poets, dormant until the latter half of the thirteenth century. Actually, Goliards, troubadours, trouvères, and twelfth-century English lyricists of a lost tradition were all composing at the same time. Whether the obviously identical conventions each group employed emerged simultaneously out of a "collective unconscious" or whether communication and sharing of ideas were

swift among the different groups are questions that will concern us later. Right now, we cannot say whether it is troubadour or trouvère influence, or both, which at times gives shape to Middle English lyrics. All we know is that the traditions and conventions were there; what the Middle English poets make of them remains to be seen.

The Native Tradition

We have been examining the continental roots of Middle English love lyrics. We have seen how certain conventions are established and expanded well before the first Middle English lyrics appear in the thirteenth century. However, the clearest evidence of backgrounds and sources is naturally found within a country's native literature itself. Unfortunately, for English poetry of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries this method will not work. There is no written evidence of a native tradition of English lyric poetry before 1250, and because of this one is led to assume that the Middle English lyrics owe their genesis solely to the migration of the well-founded lyrical tradition on the continent. Indirect evidence, however, negates this assumption. Though we have no record of a native lyric tradition, certain facts and inferences lead us to believe examples of such a tradition are lost rather than fanciful.

Most commonly cited[23] as evidence for the lost native tradition is the incident concerning the confused priest recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis in his twelfth-century Gemma Ecclesiastica. Significant too is the reference to a presumably popular lyric in a twelfth-century sermon which then built its text around the lyrical fragment. Other references to English lyrics that existed prior to the thirteenth century are found in the chronicler of Ely's account of Cnut's song about chanting monks and in Reginald of Durham's biography of St. Godric which reproduced some of the saint's divinely

inspired verse. Finally, twelfth-century wills and law rolls make frequent mention of songbooks bequeathed or stolen; in addition, numerous snatches of these songs and verses have been preserved on the margins and fly leaves of manuscripts, the walls of famous homes, and the pillars of churches.

Fragmentary references such as these suggest the existence of a large body of folksongs and popular lyrics that was somehow destroyed during the course of history. Since parchment was expensive, it is possible that many of the lyrics originally written down were done so on materials unable to withstand the corrosive elements of time and weather, It is more likely, however, that popular verse and song were seldom actually recorded in books or manuscripts; until William Caxton set up his printing press in 1476, literature, both popular and courtly, was of an oral nature. The common people certainly relied on an oral tradition of literature; from church records and other accounts of medieval life we know that singing and dancing were common means of village entertainment. Even the wealthy owned few books. In stately homes or on village greens, oral recitations by minstrels or peasants were the standard means of presenting poetry. No wonder, then, that few examples of a native lyric tradition have been preserved. Since this native poetry was lyric in the purest sense--seldom written down but sung instead--it has been lost to us.

In addition, the Norman invasion of 1066 which introduced, among other things, French as the standard language of the nobility in England, forced whatever there might have been of a native lyric written tradition to run underground. Since French was the normal language of the educated and wealthy, all written works from the Conquest until about 1250 were in French. English poetry survived, though only in the songs of the uneducated, who persisted in speaking English. It is possible too that wandering

performers--minstrels, story-tellers, and the like--circulated from village to village reciting lyrics and ballads in English for the entertainment of the peasantry. Some of these minstrels might even have travelled to France at some point, returning to England with lyrics borrowed from the troubadours or trouvères. The Dominican and Franciscan friars, too, who came to England in the early part of the thirteenth century, mingled among the common people, preaching their sermons in English. For popular appeal, these sermons were sometimes given in verse with devices borrowed from the minstrels or from Latin hymns.[24] In this way, the native lyric was not smothered by the Norman invasion. Wandering minstrels, friars, and the memories and festivities of the English folk themselves kept it alive until written lyrics in English came into being again in the latter half of the thirteenth century.

Paradoxically, by being forced into the background by the Norman Conquest, the English lyric tradition was enriched rather than annihilated. The conventions of Goliardic and French lyrics were undoubtedly borrowed and thus introduced in England by the minstrels who wandered from parish to parish and even from court to court. And the conventions, rhythms, and rhyme schemes of Latin religious verse were made available to English poets not just by the ritual of the Mass, but also by the practices of the friars who shared the road with the minstrels. The lyric core, of course, apart from such embellishments, survived in the songs and chants of the folk themselves.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1]Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p.144.

[2]C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p.2.

[3]Maurice Valency, In Praise of Love (New York: MacMillan Co., 1958), p.36.

[4]Peter Dronke, Medieval Latin and the Rise of the European Love Lyric (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965), Vol. I, p.ix.

[5]George F. Whicher, The Goliard Poets (Cambridge, Mass.: The University Press, 1949), p.3.

[6]Ibid., pp. 5-6.

[7]Ibid., p.27. All other references to Goliardic poems are from Whicher's collection and henceforth will be cited by page or line number only.

[8]I am indebted to Professor Kenneth Wright of the Department of Greek and Latin for his invaluable assistance in translating many of the Goliardic poems I will discuss.

[9]Citations from Whicher's English translation will consist of line references only. When I cite from my own translation, I will include the phrase "in the Latin version."

[10]Alex Preminger, ed., Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p.5.

[11]D.S. Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature," Modern Language Review, 50, No. 3 (July 1955), pp. 257-269.

[12]Dronke, p. 9.

[13]Angel Flores, ed., An Anthology of Medieval Lyrics (New York: The Modern Library, 1962), p. 13. All other references to troubadour lyrics are from Flores' collection, unless otherwise noted, and henceforth will be cited by page or line number only.

[14]Guy Lee, trans., Ovid's Amores (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p.45.

[15]R.T. Hill and T.G. Bergin, eds., Anthology of the Provençal Troubadours, 2nd edition, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), Vol. II, p.174.

[16]Although Flores' version follows the translation given by James J. Wilhelm, Seven Troubadours: The Creators of Modern Verse (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), p. 68, it will be clearer to refer to Wilhelm's text. Line references in this case are from his edition.

[17]Wilhelm, p. 71.

[18]Helen Waddell, The Wandering Scholars (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), p. 186.

[19]Ibid., p. 186.

[20]Frederick Goldin, trans., Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères (New York: Anchor Press, 1973), p. 121.

[21]Ibid., p. 335. All other references to trouvère lyrics are from Goldin's collection, and henceforth will be cited by page or line number only.

[22]Ibid., p. 122.

[23]I have relied upon R.M. Wilson, The Lost Literature of Medieval England (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1970), pp. 159-186, and R.T. Davies, ed., Medieval English Lyrics (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 30-33, for the evidences I cite in the following paragraph.

[24]Baugh, p. 201.

CHAPTER II

The Earlier English Lyrics (Thirteenth-Fourteenth Centuries)

If nothing else, our study of continental love poetry has familiarized us with a set of possibilities for the love lyric. Many of these possibilities have existed since classical times; some are the unique creations or re-creations of the Goliards, troubadours, or trouvères. Aware of what has customarily been done, then, it is not at all surprising to discover that spring openings, pastoral settings, complaints, or paradoxical descriptions occur in English love lyrics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Such devices may well be the inevitable descriptive tools of a love poet--he thinks about love, and meadows in springtime, woeful laments, or beautiful young maidens just naturally suggest themselves to him--but even if they are not so self-evident, their use by the continental poets makes such devices obvious and readily available to the early English poets of love. What the English poets made of these possibilities, how they used the tools the continental poets left them, is the focus of this chapter.

The thirteenth century has left us only a few secular lyrics, and of these only two or three are explicitly about love. Some of these secular lyrics, however, are appropriate to our discussion in that they make use of themes or devices commonly associated with love in the continental poetry we have looked at before. So although "Sumer Is Icumen In" (6)[1] does not mention human love, the tone of the poem is such that its being about love is at least a possibility. For one thing, the spring opening is used to frame the poem's action. Spring and love have been thrown together since love poetry was first written; while the speaker of "Sumer Is Icumen In"

does not develop the idea of human love in the poem, he does talk about love in the animal world. Part of his joy comes from thinking of spring as the mating season, from watching the cows and sheep bleat after their young. Granted that in this poem, spring's return is not a device used to introduce a complaint on love. On the contrary, the arrival of spring is greeted in the manner of any peasant farmer who has suffered through a long, frozen winter of near starvation. One day this farmer looks up to find green woods and meadows, growing crops, and thriving livestock once again, and cannot contain himself for joy. He urges the cuckoo to "lhude sing" (l.2), in turn mingling his cry with the herald of spring's. The farmer's delight is total; he wishes only that neither the cuckoo nor the warm weather "swik . . . never nu" (l.11).

Such heartfelt and simple joy brings new meaning to the old spring opening we have seen so many times before. The poet of "Sumer Is Icumen In" uses a traditional device in an innovative way. He sings of the earth's reawakening not as a preface to a complaint on love, but simply because it is a happy and long-awaited event for those men and women whose livelihood depends on the soil and the weather. Their existence is a simple one, as their greeting of spring suggests. Plain words and simple constructions mark the poem throughout. Unlike modern English which, as Raymond Oliver, G.L. Brook, and others have pointed out, is rich in connotative meanings and associations, the Middle English words stand for concrete ideas or objects--they are "clean" in the sense of being non-abstract, indicative of the common things of life.[2] The "awe bleteth," the "bulluc sterteth," and the "cuccu singes." Such concrete words and sentences at the same time create in our minds a rich and vivid picture alive with movement, sound, and even smell. As A.K. Moore points out, this illusion

of vitality and movement pertains to both animal and plant life. Simple verbs of motion make the "slow deliberate growth of plant life" as immediate and discernible as the "fast, erratic capering of animal life;"[3] "groweth sed and bloweth med" (1.3) are movements every bit as rapid and dynamic, because of the active verbs of motion, as "bulluc sterteth, bucke uerteth" (1.8). Using only the barest tools of description, then, the poet nevertheless captures spring at its height; we see the rolling meadow, smell the flowers in the wood, and hear the cows and sheep bleating after their young. In such unadorned, unaffected ways does poetry many times achieve its power and greatness.

We have been so long examining a poem that is not really about the kinds of love this paper is concerned with for good reasons. In the first place, the imaginative reworking of old conventions is a phenomenon that appears in the actual love poetry of this century. And secondly, the simultaneous spareness yet richness of expression is a quality that truly defines the thirteenth-century love lyrics. Both effects are at work in a poem explicitly about love, "Now Springs the Spray" (62). Again, the Middle English poet has adapted the conventional spring opening to fit his own needs. The spring passage, "Nou sprinkes the sprai/al for loue icche am so seeke/that slepen i ne mai," occurs over and over as the poem's refrain, giving it a songlike quality even if the poem were not as obviously meant to be sung as "Sumer Is Icumen In." The refrain, too, turns upon a tension we have seen before in Goliardic and French poetry: spring has cured the earth of winter's blight but has had no effect upon the "sickness" of the human speaker. The refrain's most important function, however, is to serve as a sort of bare backdrop to the drama which unfolds before it.

In the tradition of the French chanson d'aventure, "Now Springs the Spray" is a dialogue between a man on horseback and a pretty young girl he meets on his travels. The setting of this little drama is given in the first stanza: as the rider sets out "this endre dai/o [his] pleyinge" (l.4-5), he comes upon "a litel mai" (l.6) who begins to sing. Her song is not merry, however; rather, she utters a curse upon the man who is presumably the cause of her lovesick insomnia described in the refrain, and laments the misfortune of anyone, like herself, who "i louue-longinge/ sal libben ai" (l.9-10). The rider speaks next, adding a note of mystery to the situation. "Son icche herde that mirie note/ thider i drogh" (l.11-12), he says. Has he misunderstood the maiden's song, or is he being cleverly facetious? Clearly, the maiden has sung anything but "a mirie note." As the rider approaches her and asks the reason for her song, a dramatic irony is at work. He finds her in an arbor with, as he sees it, "ioie inogh" (l.15). We know, however, that the narrator is mistaken, and we suspect too that his flirtatious manner and glib talk will only antagonize her in her despair. Our suspicions are borne out as the play draws to a close in stanza three. Curtly, "midde wordes fewe" (l.19), the maiden enlightens the foolish rider who has questioned her. "Mi lemman me haues bi-hot/of louue trewe;/he chaunges a newe" (l.20-22), she tells him, and again utters a threat against her fickle lover: "Yiif I mai, it shal him rewe/bi this dai" (l.23-24). The poem ends with a repetition of the burden, but its placement immediately following the maiden's ominous prediction lends an element of horror to the already mysterious poem. The woman vows to make her unfaithful lover regret his actions; in the burden she says she is so sick for love that she cannot sleep. Left with these words, and having heard her vow of revenge, we can picture her awake all

night concocting dire plots against a man she once loved. The burden thus becomes a nagging reminder of the danger and fury of a woman scorned.

Although the bare simplicity of diction and syntax we saw at work in "Sumer Is Icumen In" is not as apparent in this poem, there is still the same economy of expression belying the poem's evocative power. As we have seen, the short three-line refrain revolves around a well-known but in this case succinctly expressed tension. In one line the poet creates the idea of full-blown spring, and in the next two the idea of a speaker not in tune with the world around him. Neither does the poet go to great lengths in developing the full import of the maiden's threat at the poem's end; the juxtaposition of her threat and the final repetition of the refrain is enough to suggest the gravity of the situation.

Throughout the poem, in fact, the poet is content to present his drama "midde wordes fewe." The rider says he met the young maiden while out one day on his "pleyinge." The modern rendering of this word, "playing," is really not accurate enough for most of us. We would have to say "out seeking an adventure," "out for his own recreation," or "out wandering aimlessly and carefreely in the woods" to get the same meaning across to a modern audience. Again, it often takes a whole phrase in modern English to express what Middle English could in one word. Even descriptive passages are constructed with bare essentials: the rider finds the maiden "in an herber swot/under a bough" (l.13-14); the maiden describes her lover's infidelity in three short, strightforward lines--"mi lemman me haues bi-hot/of louue trewe/he chaunges a newe" (l.20-22). What is more, the maiden refrains from traditional womanish garrulity even while cursing her fickle boyfriend. "The clot him clingge!" (l.8), she cries. In four words she consigns her lover to an early death. She manages to "hold her

tunke stille," as the "viit in the brom" (21) advises all women, even when moved by the strongest bitterness and resentment. It is in the woman's speeches that we realize just how completely the "Now Springs the Spray" poet has minimized the descriptive narrative and dialogue in his poem. His economies lend the poem a sense of immediacy. The action is over almost as soon as it begins, yet the scene created remains, at least in our minds. It is as if we have witnessed the encounter ourselves, over the rider's shoulder.

A sense of drama and immediacy also marks two other short lyrics of this early period. As in "Sumer Is Icumen In," neither "Now Comes the Blast of Winter" (7) nor "I Walk With Sorrow" (8) deal explicitly with love, though the possibility exists just as we saw before. The speakers of both poems feel that they are out of tune with nature. From continental convention, if not from mere personal experience, we know that often love is the cause of such a discord. How differently the lovesick, or at least sorrowful, speakers express themselves in the English poems, however. Again, only the barest tools of description are used. In the first poem, a concise description of spring is given in the opening lines,

> Mirie it is while sumer ilast
> with fugheles song,

only to be opposed by a description of winter, the current season, in the next two,

> Oc nu necheth windes blast
> and weder strong.

As we have seen so many times and so much more elaborately before, the outside situation reflects the inner state of the speaker. The "fugheles song" may have been "mirie," but the narrator's lament is certainly not: "Ej! ej!" he cries, "what this nicht is long/and ich wid wel michel wrong/

soregh and murne and fast" (l.5-7). The poem turns upon such contrasts--summer and winter, past and present, "fugheles song" and "windes blast," "mirie times and times of "soregh." The contrasts themselves are not new, but the vigor of their interplay in this poem is. The poet omits all extraneous detail and lets the bare tensions exist and work side by side.

This dynamic effect is accentuated by the poem's rhyme scheme. The rhymes serve to link the contrasts, to bind them together in tense opposition. In the first half of the poem (l.1-4), summer and winter are linked: "mirie it is while sumer ilast," but "oc nu necheth windes blast;" summer is marked "with fugheles song" but winter with "weder strong." Then, in the poem's second half (l.5-7), the internal state of the speaker is by rhyme at the same time compared with the cold, harsh external present--"windes blast" and "weder strong" rhyme with "long," "wrong," and "fast" in the lament, and contrasted with the warm, merry external past--"long," "wrong," and "fast" also rhyme with "sumer ilast" and fugheles song." Such binding further emphasizes and augments the tensions that make the poem work.

Moreover, the dynamics of this poem are created with the simplest means. There is an utter lack of embellishment which sets the poem apart from contemporary continental ones embodying the same sorts of contrast and tension. In its nakedness, "Now Comes the Blast of Winter" is a better poem than thematically similar ones of Goliardic or French origin. There is a freshness, a cleanness to the English poem which the continental poets, the rare exceptions being a few Goliards, never even approached. Comparable troubadour laments sparked our interest intellectually, as a phenomenon in the history of ideas, but the lament of the English speaker evokes our emotional response. His unaffected sincerity gives him a humanity, a

realism, with which we can sympathize. His sorrow comes sincerely from the heart, not artificially as an exercise or custom.

The same sort of stark sincerity and tension makes "I Walk With Sorrow" (8) a good poem as well. Again, the narrator laments the sorrow he "walkes with" (1.4) and contrasts his state with what he sees around him. All is right elsewhere in the world; other animals are in their element--the "foweles" are "in the frith" and the "fisses" are "in the flod" (L1-2). The poet, like the birds and fish, is an animal too, a "beste" made "of bon and blod" (1.5); however, unlike the other animals, the poet is uneasy. He is not at home in his element. Indeed, he says that he "mon waxe wod" (1.3) with "sorw" (1.4). His "sorw" is not explained; his lament, though, sounds a lot like the despair and frustration of the courtly lover of troubadour tradition. There is an alternate reading of the poem's last line, however, which would indicate the speaker's sorrow is religious in nature.[4] He could be thinking of the "best of bone and blood," or Christ, and feeling despair because of his sinfulness.

Whether one reads the poem as a secular lament on love or a religious recognition of sin, the same qualities distinguish it as a good lyric. As in "Now Comes the Blast of Winter," there is no superfluous detail or embellishment to take away from the intensity of the speaker's bare emotion. It seems paradoxical that so much can be said in so few words. Rather than make things explicit, the poet relies upon the naked juxtaposition of contrasting ideas to evoke the scene in its entirety. Our minds register the fact that the birds are singing in the wood and the fishes are swimming in the water; suddenly we hear the voice of a man, just another species of "beast" (I prefer the first reading I mentioned), proclaiming that he is going mad with sorrow. So many subtle implications are created

as a result of the poet's frugality. Three kinds of beasts are compared: birds, fish, and men. The construction of the first three lines--all move in the same way from animal to a description of the animal's state of being--is such that we can assume that, just as the birds and fish are complacently at ease in the world, so too should men be at home in theirs. The syntax of the first three lines leads us to draw this comparison. However, the description of man's state of being in l.3 contrasts with the states described for the other animals. Man, then, is a different kind of animal. His ability for introspection, a result of his being endowed with reason, sets him apart from other creatures of "bon and blod." He is more aware of his world and his existence than are other creatures, and this awareness is at times painful, even maddening. While including only what is absolutely necessary in the narration of his story, then, taking advantage of the dynamics created by the naked juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, the poet has nevertheless written a moving tract on the plight of man. By understatement, moreover, he has written a lasting work of art.

Another poem, "What Love Is Like" (53) deserves our attention not so much because it is a particularly good poem, but rather because it does deal exclusively and explicitly with love. With the number of extant thirteenth-century secular lyrics as limited as it is, it seems only proper to turn our attention upon one of the very few that deal explicitly with the topic of love. Overall, this poem does not seem to work as well as the other English lyrics we have looked at. The poet of "What Love Is Like" goes a bit too far in his description of the nature of human love. Although nakedness and simplicity, qualities which certainly distinguish and empower the other poems we have studied, are not categorically in and of themselves marks of good art, perhaps the "What Love Is Like" poet would

have done better to pay them more heed. Instead, and in direct opposition to the principles which make works like "Sumer Is Icumen In" or "I Walk With Sorrow" examples of good poetry, the poet of "What Love Is Like" makes a point of saying too much; he delights in piling up a long progression of words in an attempt thoroughly to describe love. Comprehended in its entirety, the progression lacks form or meaning. Its component parts are no more than disjointed popular truisms which may be jumbled around in any order without jeopardizing our understanding of the poem. This lack of structure makes such a long progression of details unnecessary and monotonous; the poet could have made his point much sooner and more briefly.

Given the overkill which subjects the poem to mediocrity overall, there are nevertheless moments, certain specific instances, where particular lines of the poem are working in such a way as to make them good. It is interesting to note that these random examples distinguish themselves in ways we have seen before. For instance, there is that same quality of homely simplicity that characterizes the greatness of a poem like "Sumer Is Icumen In" sporadically at work in "What Love Is Like:" the poet says over and over again that "love is like this and this and this" but when he says that love is "bot yare" (l.3), "strong to striden on stede" (l.9), "hot as glouinde glede" (l.11), or has "his stiuart bi sti and bi strete" (l.13), he breaks away from the monotonous triteness which characterizes the poem. Such metaphors are simple and unaffected; they have a proverbial rustic charm that endows them with a human realism and sincerity not attained by the majority of the poet's trite truisms.

The poem, then, does exhibit brief moments of excellence when it breaks away from triteness and achieves a unique homely realism; there is an excellence, too, in some of the juxtapositions the poet creates. The sense of

the paradoxes inherent in love, something we saw interested the continental poets, is presented aptly and straightforwardly by the "What Love Is Like" poet in the first and second stanzas of his poem. "Loue is sofft, loue is swet, loue is goed sware," he says, but juxtaposes this sentence with one which says that "loue is muche tene, loue is muchel kare." And in the second stanza, love is said to be at the same time "god hele" and "lecher and les, and lef for to tele." No explanation is given for love's contrariety and this is good, for in his reticence the poet creates a naked and powerful tension by letting such striking opposites exist and interact side by side. At times, too, the poet charges this tension to an even more intense pitch by not only juxtaposing contrasting ideas but also by binding them together through rhyme or alliteration. Love inflames one with "hete" yet is is "sete," or proper (l.15-16); love is both "les" and "lef" at the same time, and it inspires both "longinge" and "frowringe" (l.19-20); love is simultaneously "wise" and "wilful" (l.16), "wele" and "wo" (l.22). Although the poet goes overboard in making his point--"love is a riddle; love is an extreme in either direction"--he does in specific instances rely on a more subtle means of expression, in this way saving an otherwise unexceptional poem from total mediocrity. Interestingly enough, the points at which the poem rises above dullness and monotony are due to qualities which we saw at work in better poems. When the "What Love Is Like" poet writes simply and unaffectedly, when he refrains from over-explanation and lets bare tensions work dynamically side by side, he writes well. And this kind of reticence, this kind of plainness and self-restraint, is what distinguishes the truly exceptional poems of this period.

What makes such poems exceptional? Are the various qualities we singled out as conducive to making each particular poem "good" good in and

of themselves? Can we say unequivocably, for instance, that sincerity, or economy of expression, or the creation of tension is a fundamental criterion of good poetry? Obviously we cannot; such generalization would be both presumptuous and misleading. But these questions do demand an answer, if for no other reason than that they are at the root of the qualitative judgments we have been making about certain lyrics. We must answer them, for we must be able to justify the basis for such judgments.

Very well; while we cannot generalize about specific qualities--for each poem that seems to us "good" is a unique entity that seems so for unique and separate reasons--we can generalize about the judgment process that leads us to call certain poems good. Initially, our judgment is based upon a feeling, a gut reaction, that we have when we first read a poem--or watch a play or look at a painting, for that matter. If a work of art is good, it somehow arrests us, strikes us, interests us, provokes us. Something inside us makes us remember the play or painting or, in this case, poem; for some reason or combination of reasons, that particular creation has worked for us, has struck us in some way. At this initial stage of forming our judgment, we do not know precisely how the poem or painting is working; intelligent analysis is not necessary at this point. It suffices that somehow the poem is alive to us. After this initial reaction, which is the most simple yet at the same time the most important criterion for our judgment, for without it nothing else will follow, we begin to look for reasons which will explain or sustain our first impression. We know the poem is working; we now want to discover how. In the five poems we just examined, bareness, simplicity, and a stark dynamic tension seem to be the causes of their success (or, in the case of the last poem, "What Love Is Like," partial success). The particular elements which produce such

effects are different in every case. This is as it should be; each poem is a unique creation which works in unique ways.

Part of these English lyrics' goodness, too, it seems, stems from the fact that we were familiar with the possibilities for the love lyric from our study of the poetry of the continent. Certain conventions were established on the continent, equipping us with certain expectations; these expectations form another part of the basis for our judgment of the English lyrics. Knowing what had been done before, we were all the more aware of the new possibilities created by the English poets' reworking of the old ones of the continent. The spring opening, the melancholy lover not in tune with his surroundings, the paradox of love: these possibilities, as we have seen, are developed in new ways, put to new, individual uses, by the poets of thirteenth-century England. For instance, the spring opening in "Sumer Is Icumen In" has a function beyond its traditional one as a prelude to a love lament, and in "Now Springs the Spray" it serves as a backdrop to a short, dramatic encounter. In both cases, an old convention is set, so to speak, to new music. And although they are somewhat out of our scope, it is in the religious lyrics of this century that we see how completely the English poets adapted the old conventions to fit their own specific needs. The free exchange of imagery and diction between secular and religious lyrics of this period is well known; it is therefore not surprising to find religious poets making use of the same conventions as the love poets. Catalogued descriptions of a maiden's beauty are used to praise the Virgin (see "A Prayer to the Mother of Mildness," 55, or "Mother Mild, Flower of All," 61), spring openings introduce meditations on religious scenes (see "A Springtide Song of the Redemption," 54), and laments on man's sinfulness are couched in the language of the heartsick lover (see

"A Spring Song of Love to Jesus," 63, or "Penitence for a Wasted Life," 2). Thus the possibilities for the love lyric as set on the continent take on new and different aspects in the hands of the thirteenth-century English poets.

As we turn now to the lyrics of the fourteenth century, our interest is once again in the qualities which make the good poems work and the mediocre poems fail. We have, too, a certain historical interest in the poetry of this next century; we cannot help but compare and contrast it with the poetry which has gone before. Are there differences between lyrics of the fourteenth and those of the thirteenth century? Are new possibilities, new conventions, established in the fourteenth century? Are the ways in which the fourteenth-century lyrics are good different from the ways in which those of the thirteenth century were? We hope to be able to answer these questions, but before we begin, one important difference that characterizes the lyrics of the fourteenth century must be noted. Since by the fourteenth century English was thoroughly re-established as the language not just of the peasantry but of the nobility as well, we find a body of poetry quite different in spirit and style not only from the lyrics of the thirteenth century, but too from other lyrics of the fourteenth century as well.

For the sake of clarity, it has been useful to organize these fourteenth-century lyrics according to the "popular" and "courtly" categories set up by R.H. Robbins in his anthology. Such categorization has met with strong and, it seems, valid opposition; many so-called "popular" lyrics, those composed either by or for the common people (i.e., the five thirteenth-century poems just discussed), have a sophistication that renders them courtly, and many "courtly" lyrics, those written for an educated aristocratic audience, have a simplicity and homeliness that points

to a popular or folk origin. Granted such inconsistencies, some notice must nevertheless be paid to the difference between the "high" and "low" styles that occur simultaneously in the English lyrics of the fourteenth century. Most simply, poems written in the low style reflect the current tastes and customs in diction and imagery of the common people; those in the high style, often written at the request or in honor of some nobleman, reflect the more refined and educated tastes of the aristocracy.[5] More practically, Robbins distinguishes the two kinds of poetry in terms of the way in which they were preserved. His "popular" poems, "those trivial . . . pieces which were held unworthy of permanent record,"[6] are found in minstrel collections, practical commonplace books, or casually doodled upon the fly-leaves of other manuscripts. Notations of popular lyrics are hidden, too, among the pages of sermon collections denouncing secular verse and the wicked people who enjoy it. On the other hand, Robbins distinguishes as "courtly" those pieces which "were written by and for people of wealth [and thus] preserved for their own supposed worth"[7] in large, carefully written collections. Whether moved by stylistic or more purely practical considerations, then, we must acknowledge the existence of both popular and courtly lyrics in the body of poetry we are about to examine.

The popular lyrics of the fourteenth century differ noticeably from their thirteenth-century predecessors in two ways: first, they are more explicitly about love; and second, they seem to be the products of a more subjective, personal emotion[8] and of an increased awareness of the sophisticated artistic effects that can be brought about by the devices of figurative language. The validation of our first observation rests in a poem like "A Toast to His Lost Mistress" (9).[9] If we recall some of

the twelfth-century French lyrics we studied, there is really nothing new about the English speaker's protestation of love for a lost mistress in this poem. The anguish and vehemence of his lament are quite original, however, and form the basis for part of our second assumption; even the trouvères in their tendency towards a greater subjectivity of expression never brought home with such force the intensity of personal emotion. The narrator of "A Toast to His Lost Mistress" is so distraught that he literally cannot speak. His speech reads not as a poem, but as an actual (though anachronistic) transcription of a tape recording made of him at the moment he spoke. He manages to get his first sentence (l.1-4) out in one piece: he pledges to buy "outher ale or wyn" (l.1-2) in token of his great love for his "lemmon." His next sentence, although it does again come out in one piece, is not quite as coherent. He pledges to take revenge on anyone, "thaut he were the kynges sone of normaundy" (l.7-8), who would dare to "make my lef al blody" (l.6). Somehow his meaning is not all that clear; why would his mistress be subject to such violence? Perhaps she is a Brunhild of sorts, a military woman who engages in battle; this does, however, seem rather far-fetched!

The narrator becomes even more incoherent as he goes on. He says, twice, that he is "welle wo" (l.11-12), and "the man that leset that he louit/hym is also" (l.13-14). There is a confusion in syntax at this point; it is as if the speaker is temporarily carried away with his grief and his memories, musing to himself for awhile, before suddenly snapping back to the present and making his point--"hym is also." After this, however, it is all downhill for the narrator. He cannot finish his next sentence; he breaks off in the middle of it crying "ne--no more i n'can!" (l.16). After a few seconds' pause to collect his thoughts and catch his

breath--and as we read the poem we actually rest here, too, waiting for the speaker to regain his composure--he ends quickly with a brief wish that Christ preserve "hire . . . that was my lemman" (l.17-18).

Whether the speaker's composure breaks down so completely as a result of his intoxication (the opening lines about "ale or wyn" and the whole confessional, distraught tone to the poem suggest that this may indeed be the case) or of his becoming more and more immersed in painful memories is not quite clear; what is striking is that we have such a realistic account of this breakdown. The sincerity, the credibility of the situation is never in doubt. We have before us not the dispassionate, cool and calculated recounting of the sadness of unrequited love, but rather the actual, seemingly taped or made-on-location text of the feelings expressed by one particular miserable man. The subjectivity, the personality, of this expression makes "A Toast to His Lost Mistress" the good poem it is--good because we cannot help but feel that initial shock, that inexplicable gut reaction, when we first read it. We find ourselves pausing for breath, growing alternately meditative or provoked as his words demand. The poem, in its ability thus to manipulate and direct the feelings of its readers, succeeds as good poetry will.

Hand in hand with this increased subjectivity of expression comes an increase in the fourteenth-century poets' use of more personal stylistic devices. It is only natural that as poets begin to describe their own personal emotions in their poetry, they too begin to use more personal, individual tools in shaping these descriptions. We saw how words--bare, concrete, "clean" words--were an integral part of the success of several lyrics of the thirteenth century. Words, too, play a vital role in the success of the fourteenth-century lyrics we are about to consider, but in quite a different way. Rather than construct their poems by means of

concrete, plain, non-connotative words, as did the thirteenth-century poets, the fourteenth-century poets of "All Night By the Rose" (17) or "The Hawthorn Tree" (16) instead take advantage of the connotative, associative, symbolic power of words.

"All Night by the Rose" (17) is a simple and yet somewhat puzzling account of a thief who spends the night by a rosebush and in the morning steals the flower but not the rose away. The rhyme is simple and the syntax straightforward; even the diction is simple, consisting of natural, everyday words. This pervasive simplicity, however, is deceptive: "rose," "flour," and "stele" are not used concretely. Instead, the poet turns them into symbols. In one interpretation, the narrator does not actually lie "al nist by the rose;" he lies by the side of a young girl. And he does not actually steal a "flour;" he steals her virginity. In another,[10] the poet is speaking metaphorically not about seducing his girlfriend, but about receiving the grace of Christ, the "flour," by virtue of Mary, traditionally associated with the rose, having borne Him. If this is the case, it is interesting to note the transference of a secular, somewhat bawdy frame of imagery into a frame of reference that is devout in a religious sense.

"The Hawthorn Tree" (16), like "All Night by the Rose," works in simple ways (repetition, simple rhyme, straightforward syntax) and employs a simple symbolism, reminiscent of the rhetorical device enigma, which exhibits characteristics of the riddle,[11] as well. The narrator claims that the hawthorn tree, which "blowet suotes of euerykune tre" (l.3-4) and is "the fairest of erthkinne" (l.7), shall be his "lemmon." As in the first poem, the narrator is certainly not speaking literally of becoming enamored of a tree; and as in the first poem as well, the figurative understanding

of "The Hawthorn Tree" is on two levels. The narrator may be metaphorically comparing his mistress to the fairest of all trees, the hawthorn; as this is not a particularly flattering compliment, and as the hawthorn is a traditional symbol of the Virgin, it seems more likely that he is talking about dedicating himself to the mother of God, "the fairest of erthkinne." As before, the free exchange in terminology and imagery between secular and religious poets is something to consider.

In fact, this may be the only aspect, besides the symbolism, worth considering in these poems because obviously neither achieves startling heights as a work of art. They do not move us with the force of a poem like "I Walk With Sorrow" or "A Toast to His Lost Mistress," yet they do bear mentioning if only because they are early examples of a new way of looking at language. In using plain, ordinary words in a symbolic way, the poets of both lyrics are approaching literature in more personal, more subjective terms.

So far, we have not been able to say much about the ways in which the poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries thought of love. The lyrics we have left to us have not been concerned either that explicitly or that much in depth with the theme of love; we have yet to see any real adoption of the conventions of courtly love in Middle English poetry, for example. When we consider the courtly lyrics of the fourteenth century, however, the French tradition does poke its head out. This is not surprising if we remember that these courtly lyrics were written by or for the more aristocratic quarter of society, and they were only just beginning to abandon the French customs and language imposed on them by William the Conqueror two hundred years before. These courtly poems, then, are obviously going to present quite a contrast to the popular lyrics

composed in the same century. The style of their composition is much more ornate and "elevated," as we are made aware of in courtly poems like "A Farewell to His Mistress, III" (204) or "To Her Lover" (207).

Unfortunately, this elegance in style works against both poems. Despite their pretty ornamentation in diction and imagery, neither works as art. The "Farewell" poem is incredibly monotonous--every line except the last in each stanza begins with "farewell" and continues with a pretentious metaphor for the departing mistress--and the "To Her Lover" poem is so stilted as to preclude comprehension at some points: "yn your confidence my worde I haue closyde" (l.7), the narrator says with effort, and "exyle me nott owt of remembrance" (l.10), she struggles to plead. The superficial, outward elegance of these poems cannot make up for the utter monotony and trite complexity which marks them at root.

Chaucer's two poems "Complaint Unto Pity" and "A Complaint to His Lady"[12] are too plagued with, as Wolfgang Clemen says, the "pedantry and sameness"[13] that result from a too-heavy reliance on convention. Although Chaucer's use of allegory and certain set imagery in both poems is quite conventional, both being drawn directly from the courtly French verse of the fourteenth century,[14] he manages to combine convention with a certain personal touch that to some extent rescues his poems from the fate of the two discussed above. While his vivid and imaginative depiction of "Pite's" symbolic death (see especially l.10-21; 36-42) and the enthronement of her adversary, "Crueltee" (see l.64-70; 78-91), in the "Complaint Unto Pity" and his imaginative allegorical description of his lady (see l.23-29) as well as his remarkable images of a heart enflamed with or hardened against love (see l.35-36; 56-57) in the "Complaint to His Lady" are based on French conventions, each passage is nevertheless striking when placed against the context

both of the poem itself and of its contemporaries. These passages stand out within the poem itself because they are vivid and evocative; moreover, considered against the background of other fourteenth-century poems, the allegory in this poem, though rooted in convention, seems nevertheless remarkably novel and interesting. In this way, the poem is saved from the utter deadness pervading the other two courtly poems we discussed. Chaucer's descriptive powers, then, are the means by which convention is infused with life; merely "correcting" (l.21) the "englyshe" (l.20) of her "letter of translatyon/owt of frenche" (l.19-20) obviously does not achieve the same effect, however much the narrator of "To Her Lover" hopes otherwise.

There are a few courtly lyrics that do not even pretend to the high, ornate style in language that becomes so characteristic of the "noble" poetry written in this century and the next. By contrast, these other lyrics have a definite affinity with the popular poems of this period. "To Annys" (146) exhibits the same kind of heartfelt sincerity and humanity that distinguished "A Toast to His Lost Mistress." The speaker of this poem begins with a hopeful greeting to his loved one, Annys. After this brief introduction, however, he loses control of his emotions in much the same way as the speaker of "A Toast to His Lost Mistress" does. And, like this other speaker, he records what must be a literal transcription of his thoughts; all he can do is say her name, over and over again: "Annys, Annys, Annys, Annys, Annes!" (l.5). He elaborates a bit in the closing lines that follow: "Annes, be now stedfaste on allewys/and dynke on me, my swete Annys/my fayre Annys, my sothe Annys/I love yowre" (l.6-9). Most editors regard the last line as incomplete due to a fault in the manuscript, and while this is undoubtedly the case, the unfinished line has a certain integrity and force. In its slow trailing off, the last line

seems to sum up the speaker's feelings of inadequacy in trying to talk about Annys. He just cannot do it; words are not enough to describe the way he feels about her, so he stops trying. The poignancy of his attempt makes the poem come alive for us, and moreover, makes it succeed where others fail.

The same sort of plaintive emotion makes "Bird on Briar" (147) a successful lyric as well. Although its sentiments are conventional--the narrator is filled with pain and sorrow at his lady's indifference to him, and feels he must fall into his "graue" (l.4) if her cruelty continues--the poem's unique manner of expression makes it a striking example of the imagination of some of the more daring poets of love. The narrator utters a conventional lament in the tradition of the unrequited lover, it is true, but he addresses it to a "bryd one brere" (l.1). In the first stanza, the bird seems to be the same person as his beloved, for the speaker "comes of loue to craue" (l.2) that the bird "on me rewe or . . . greid thu me my graue" (l.3-4). But in the next two stanzas, the bird is dissociated from the lady, and instead becomes a kind of supernatural figure to whom the speaker confesses his feelings for his mistress and from whom he begs that his beloved will be subject to his "wille" (l.9), "stedefast of loue," "trewe," and willing to save him from his sorrow (l.10-11). In these last stanzas, the bird takes on the role of Mother Nature, author of the "lawe of kynd," who can see to it that all creation be in tune with her decrees. In the first stanza, after all, the narrator calls himself "kynd" who has come to her, "loue," to "craue" of love. Such symbolic suggestion adds a note of human realism, of pathos, to the otherwise ordinary sentiments expressed in the poem.

Familiar now, then, with the kinds of things at work in both popular

and courtly lyrics of the fourteenth century, and cognizant of both the differences and similarities between the two groups, we must turn to a body of lyrics which does not seem to belong to either classification. The Harley lyrics seem to form a bridge between the simplicity and homeliness of the popular lyrics on the one hand, and the sophistication and ornateness of the courtly ones on the other. As we saw to some extent in the courtly lyrics we just discussed, the Harley lyrics make use of the situations and phraseology of courtly love. However, the Harley poets absolutely reshape those conventions in an innovative and interesting way. Still, it seems to me that if we were not so familiar with the courtly love conventions which arose on the continent, the charm of the Harley lyrics may well have escaped us. It is because we are able to compare and contrast the Harley lyrics with the troubadour and trouvère lyrics which preceeded them that we recognize the subtle novelties of the English poems.

"Alysoun" (4)[15] opens with a typical spring beginning and proceeds to catalogue the woes of the lovesick narrator. If that were all it did, it would not deserve the consideration we are going to give it. Instead, the poem actually readapts these conventions, plays itself off against them. The spring opening describes the return of the "spray" (1.2) and the birds' song (1.3-4) to the earth; in particular, attention is drawn to the song of one certain bird, "the lutel foul" (1.3). This bird, which "hath hire wyl/on hyre lud to synge" (1.3-4), is presumably singing a cheerful melody in keeping with the season. A tension is created, then, when the human narrator begins his own song immediately following, and it is mournful and in opposition to the spirit of springtime around him:

> Ich libbe in loue-longinge
> for semlokest of alle thynge. (1.5-6)

Indeed, this contrast turns around again as we read the hopeful, cheerful refrain which follows upon the heels of the speaker's initial lament. He may be sick with "loue-longinge" and subject to his lady's "baundoun," but in the refrain he tells us that his situation is actually "an hendy hap" (l.9) sent to him from heaven. In the next three stanzas, he tells us that her rejection makes him "longe to lyuen . . . forsake" (l.19), and makes him "wende ent wake" (l.22) all through the night, "wery so water in wore" (l.32). Yet after each stanza, the same cheerful, determined refrain is juxtaposed. Is the refrain then ironic? On the contrary; the recurring note of cheer and hope in the refrain is the Harley poet's way of reshaping the conventions of courtly love. Although the speaker laments his lady's disdain, he, unlike the courtly lovers of troubadour or trouvère tradition, neverthless prefers to love, albeit unrequitedly, than to be passively indifferent. As he says in the last stanza, "betere is tholien whyle sore/then mournen euermore" (l.35-36), or in other words: "I would rather have loved and lost than have never loved at all."

The sound patterns of the poem too enhance these contrasting notes of sorrow and joy. In the second stanza, both the sense and the sound of the speaker's threat that if his lady will not take him as her mate he will

> longe to lyuen. . . forsake
> ant feye fallen adoun
> (l.19-20)

move heavily downwards. The sense does this by means of the connotations of the diction alone ("forsake," "feye," "fallen," "adoun") and the sound by means of sonorous alliteration ("longe," "lyuen;" "forsake," "feye," "fallen") and stress (the first line has four stresses, while the second ends abruptly with three; moreover, the first line proceeds almost in sing-song fashion, as a unit, the two- and three-syllable words running together

to form a rhythmical whole, while the second line trudges ponderously along, each one-syllable word receiving its own jarring stress). Alliteration in the third and fourth stanzas, too, produces a mournful /w/ sound that complements the sense of the speaker's lament:

> Nihtes when y wende ant wake
> forthi myn wonges waxeth won
> (1.22-23)
> Icham for wowyng al forwake
> wery so water in wore.
> (1.31-32)

In each case, however, the lightness and joviality of the merry refrain produce both a sense and a sound that relieve the heaviness of the actual stanzas: the /a/, /e/, and /i/ sounds, along with the quick, light end-rhymes, produce a gaity, melody, and lightness that contrast with the ideas presented in the stanzas themselves.

In another manner, too, the poem conforms in its own way to the conventions of love poetry on the continent. The narrator, as is customary, catalogues some of the specifics of his lady's beauty. These specifics are not quite in keeping with those traditional on the continent, however. For example, Alysoun has "blake" eyes (1.14), a "middel smal ant wel imake" (1.16), and is called the "geynest under gore" (1.37). All of these references are stark and factual, not really on a par with the conventional, sophisticated language and imagery used in such descriptions on the continent. Moreover, the narrator's vision of his lady as "fairest under gown" has explicit sexual overtones, besides being rather a stark, severe delineation of her beauty. In various ways, then, does the poet of "Alysoun" adapt continental conventions to suit his own needs.

"Spring" (11) is a good poem for many of the same reasons. In overall structure, it conforms to the spring opening, man-out-of-tune-with-nature

tradition. In its particulars, however, the poem shows originality. The opening lines state that spring has arrived, both in the animal (it comes "with blosmen ant with briddes roune," l.2) and the human (it comes too "to toune," l.1) worlds. So far, the English poem follows its continental models. But its narrator does not mention spring's return just as a device, a tool for turning his thoughts towards love; on the contrary, he makes spring the actual subject of his poem. All three of its stanzas describe spring's arrival in great detail: in the first, the blooming of "dayeseyes" (l.4), and the singing of the "nyhtegale" (l.5), "threstelcoc" (l.7), and "woderoue" (l.9) are described; in the second, the reddening of the rose (l.13), the brightening of the "leues" (l.14), the shining of the "mone" (l.16), the beauty of the "lilie" (l.17), "fenyl," and "fille" (l.18), and the mating of the "wilde drakes" and other "miles" (l.19-20) are depicted; and in the third, the moonlight (l.25), sunlight (l.26), and dew-freshened "dounes" (l.28) are pictured. The whole poem is thus about spring; the mention of its return in the opening lines was not a mere gimmick or conventional hint of a love lament to follow.

This is not to say that a love lament does not occur in the poem; it does, at the end of both the second and third stanzas. It is not, however, the traditional moan and complaint that we saw so many times in the works of the troubadours or trouvères. It is not to be understood alone, cannot be taken out of context, as the courtly lover laments in some French poems can be (see, for instance, some of the works of Gacé Brulé or Le Châtelain de Couci). Instead, it receives its meaning and power from the text around it. The narrator has elaborately painted a picture of the earth in spring for us in all its splendor and glory; suddenly he introduces a human character into his fresh, green picture, and in contrast to his surroundings

this character is pensive and mournful. His lament, though traditional--the flowers are blooming, the birds are singing, the wild ducks and even the "wormes" (l.31) are mating, but the narrator, finding that "wymmen waxeth wounder proude" (l.32), is sadly out of tune with nature--is far from trite. On the contrary, it is imbued with a sharp poignancy and power by virtue of its skillful placement in the middle of a natural scene everywhere else characterized by happiness, harmony, and peace. The contrast yet interdependence between this merry natural scene, so vividly depicted for us, and the sad despair of the narrator's lament makes the poem so unique and so striking.

This same sort of effect, this tension created by the Harley poets' skillful readaptation of continental conventions, seems to be what distinguishes the other Harley lyrics as well. In "Blow, Northerne Wynd" (14), though the speaker's plight is the traditional one of the unrequited courtly lover, his complaint is somewhat different. The speaker addresses his love lament not to the general audience, as is customary, but rather to a specific character in the poem, Love. He embellishes his lament to Love even further by couching it in terms of a short, simple allegory: he describes how his mistress has sent "hire knyhtes," "Sykyng, Sorewyng, and thoht" (l.59-60), to torment him "ageyn the poer of Pees" (l.62). Love's reply is just as interesting: he advises that the narrator come right out and ask his lady for mercy "er then thou falle ase fen of fote" (l.76). Such homely, rustic imagery reimbues the courtly love lyric, which had come so near to sterility and deadness in the later troubadours, with sincerity and power. The same kind of imagery occurs elsewhere in the poem, again infusing it with an element of simple sincerity or human realism. The narrator describes his mistress' beauty in conventional

fashion, but too says she is the loveliest "burde of blod ant of bon" (l.10) that he has seen "bi est, bi west, by north ant south" (l.44), and that her fingers, "feyre forte folde" (l.29), along with her "theyes, legges, fet, ant al" (l.33), are "ywraht . . . of the beste" (l.34). Such statements, although they are, as D.S. Brewer points out,[16] quite conventional in their own right (indeed, even the allegory described above, while striking in this English poem, is not original but comes off a long line of allegorical tradition in France), they are at the same time so simple and straightforward, so homely and unsophisticated, that they nevertheless make the poem remarkable.

Eventually, however, as we read on through the Harley lyrics, this simple, unaffected manner of speaking does lose much of its novelty and power of surprise as it is used over and over again. Annot in "Annot and John" (3) is described, like Alysoun is, as "glad under gore" (l.16) and (similar to the "bi est and bi west" hyperbole of "Blow Northerne Wynd") wisest "ffrom Weye . . . into Wyrhale" (l.27). One of the "wilde wymmen" (l.2) of Ribblesdale in "The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale" (7) is called the fairest that "euer wes mad of blod and bon" (l.5), and too has "fyngres ... feir to folde" (l.55). The speaker's beloved in "The Meeting in the Wood" (8) is again "gladly on gere" (l.4), and the lady of "When the Nyhtegale Singes" (25) is called the fairest "betuene Lyncolne ant Lyndeseye, Norhamptoun ant Lounde" (l.17). Somehow, though, even while these expressions keep cropping up, they retain their vigor and sincerity. We recall that similar epithets, occurring again and again in the lyrics of the troubadours (wherein the courtly lover's lady was like the sun, like a rose, like a jewel), tended to lose their meaning, to become flat, stale, and unremarkable. Perhaps the Middle English expressions are able to retain

their original force on even the fiftieth occasion of their use because they do not pretend to eloquence or sophistication. Instead, they remain straightforward, homely, simple, and unaffected. The mixture, then, of high and low styles, country and courtly imagery, is the tension upon which the Harley lyrics are built. It is as if the Harley poets were aware of our assumptions garnered on the continent, and were thus able skillfully to play off their lyrics against these assumptions.

This overview of the fourteenth-century lyrics is by nature just that. In general, we can see the development of an interest in a more subjective, personal expression as expressed in more personal language; language, that is, that is less objectively concrete and more subjectively abstract or figurative. This interest in language shows itself, too, in the conscious use of a "high" or elevated style in the courtly lyrics of this century. And too, in the Harley lyrics, we see the emergence of a conscious desire on the poet's part to play with, thereby reshaping, our assumptions based on the conventions established on the continent. But no matter how valid these generalizations, how marked these tendencies, we must always bear in mind that the evidence upon which they are based is by no means profuse. In the thirteenth century, there were only five lyrics pertinent to our discussion; the same thing applies to our study of the fourteenth century--although the Harley manuscript and to some extent the body of courtly lyrics provide a fair amount of evidence for our conclusions, our discussion of the trends apparent in popular poetry had to be based on the content of only three or four lyrics.

The consolation comes when we look at the lyrics of the fifteenth century, however; first, a large body of them has been preserved, and second, they do justify the somewhat guarded generalizations we have made

about the fourteenth century. The nature of these later lyrics is such that in them we see the final concretion of the vague tendencies we thought we saw in the lyrics of the two earlier centuries. The reasoning behind our generalizations, then, is validated by projection; the lyrics of the fifteenth century are the natural result of what we may have only thought we saw before. In fact, we did see it, as the next century's lyrical crop will bear out.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1]Carleton Brown, ed., English Lyrics of the Thirteenth Century (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932), p. 13. Although I have relied on Maxwell Luria and Richard Hoffman, Middle English Lyrics (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1974) for textual glosses, all citations from thirteenth-century lyrics are henceforth from Brown's edition and according to his titles and lyric rather than page numbers.

[2]G.L. Brook, ed., The Harley Lyrics (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1968), pp. 20-21.

[3]Arthur K. Moore, The Secular Lyric in Middle English (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1951), p. 52.

[4]Edmund Reiss, The Art of the Middle English Lyric (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 20.

[5]These simple definitions appear in Raymond Oliver, Poems Without Names (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 74-85.

[6]Rossell H. Robbins, ed., Secular Lyrics of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), p. xxxiii.

[7]Ibid., p. xxxiv.

[8]One distinction: we saw what could be called subjective personal emotion in such thirteenth-century poems as "Sumer Is Icumen In," "Now Comes the Blast of Winter," and "I Walk With Sorrow." However, these poems are at the same time the expression of a whole group. One man speaks for many in each case--a particular speaker delights in spring in "Sumer Is Icumen In" yet his cry is the cry of all peasants who have endured winter's hardships; a particular speaker "waxes wod" in "I Walk With Sorrow" yet his plight is the plight of all men. Subjectivity in the fourteenth century, by contrast, is much more particularized and individualized, as we shall see.

[9]Robbins, p. 7. Although I have relied upon Luria and Hoffman's Middle English Lyrics for textual glosses, again all citations from fourteenth-century popular and courtly lyrics are henceforth from Robbins' edition and according to his titles and lyric rather than page numbers.

[10]Reiss, p. 105.

[11]Lee A. Sonnino, A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 202.

[12]F.N. Robinson, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), pp. 526, 528.

[13]Wolfgang Clemen, Chaucer's Early Poetry (London: Methuen and Co., 1963), p. 176.

[14]Ibid., p. 180.

[15]Brook, p. 33. Although I have relied upon Luria and Hoffman's Middle English Lyrics for textual glosses, once again all citations from the Harley lyrics are henceforth from Brook's edition and according to his titles and lyric rather than page numbers.

[16]D.S. Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature," Modern Language Review, 50, No. 3 (July 1955), pp. 257-269.

CHAPTER III

The Later English Lyrics (Fifteenth Century)

The lyrics of the fifteenth century bring together many of the tendencies we noted in the earlier lyrics. The increased awareness of the possibilities of language which we saw developing in the fourteenth century becomes even clearer in the fifteenth in both the bawdy double entendres of the popular lyrics and the aureate diction of the courtly ones. And the awareness of convention and the ways in which it can be used to the poet's own artistic advantage are also more sharply apparent in the lyrics of the fifteenth century. In both cases, the fifteenth century is not just evidence that these tendencies were kept up; the fifteenth century does something more--it brings these tendencies to a head, it works them into a sharp focus. Although to a lesser degree, the fifteenth century does more than just preserve the kind of verse I call "functional"--poems of general wisdom (proverbial in nature), advice, or celebration--as well. It too elaborates on this early genre, gives it in some cases a new and different focus.

This functional verse shows itself in the earliest manuscripts we have from the thirteenth century, in such forms as drinking songs or mnemonic verses about medicinal herbs, the calendar, or the weather. In the fourteenth century, functional verse comes to lend itself to love, in a poem like "Against Hasty Marriage,I" (40 in Robbins), which advises against a rash plunge into marriage. In the fifteenth century, this aspect of functional verse is capitalized upon. "The Trials of Marriage" (39)[1] is too a poem of advice against rash marriage. Like "Against Hasty Marriage,I," the later poem is built upon a contrast: both describe

marriage as it seems before the actual ceremony as contrasted with how it is after the ceremony. And both develop this contrast by means of one specific image: the earlier poem speaks of "knowing before one knits" onself in marriage, and the later one of "looking broad instead of winking oneself into marriage and staring afterwards." Both are interesting in a quaint, comical way and both express a rather rakish fear of the kind of binding committment to love found in marriage. Clearly, the fifteenth-century poem is better in that it is more direct and epigrammatic. The wit and aptness of the metaphor and the advice of "Against Hasty Marriage,I" are blunted by the poet's simultaneous attempt to fashion his poem, too, into a tonguetwister. The reader's confusion in articulating the lines filled with "knots," "knyts," and "knows" results in his confusion in understanding the meaning or sense of these same lines--and thus their epigrammatic punch or force is lost. But although the later poem is better, it is still merely evidence that certain traditions--in this case, the functional, advice kind of poem--were kept up in the fifteenth century.

As we will continue to notice, however, the fifteenth century takes such traditional ideas one step further. Advice poems are in and of themselves nothing new, but the poets of the fifteenth century elaborate on their subject matter in such a way as to make them new. "A Henpecked Husband's Complaint, I" is an example of this kind of remaking. The speaker, as is typical, gives advice, again typical, against marriage. But the situation is a new one: he identifies himself in the first stanza as a young man who has made the fatal mistake of taking as his own an "elde wywys" (1.2). He then goes on to describe her dreadful power over him--he "dar not seyn quan she seyt 'pes!'" (1.4,8,etc.), he dare "not askyn our dame a spon" when she serves him lunch (1.7-8), and if he does

go so far as to ask for bread, meat, or cheese she either beats him or insults him. The concise, straightforward, epigrammatic style of the typical advice poem, then, has here been elaborated upon; the speaker does give his audience a warning, but he goes beyond this purely practical aspect of functional verse to create a story, and a vivid one at that, complete with characters and dialogue.

In two other fifteenth-century examples of functional verse, moreover, the explicit "advice" function has disappeared altogether. "A Henpecked Husband's Complaint,II" (44) describes the woeful existence of a hardworking, henpecked husband. He works all day in the fields only to see his wife devour the fruits of his labor and beat him if he objects in any way (l.1-3). In fact, his whole existence revolves around beatings, both physical and mental: if he says "ougt of hyr but good" (l.5), she "clvgts [him] abovgt the hod" (l.7); if she wishes to go out for ale, he must run by her side and sit quietly while she drinks (l.9-11); if he should say "it shal be thus" (l.13), she cries that he is lying and threatens to "ouercome" (l.15) him. Although the speaker does ask God's mercy on any man in a similar plight, he never speaks out directly in an advisory manner.

The same thing holds true in "A Carefree Life" (8). The speaker expresses sentiments familiar to us from poems like "Against Hasty Marriage, I" or "The Trials of Marriage"--he praises the carefree life of a bachelor--yet he never directs an explicit warning to his audience. The warning is implicit; by describing the "merry life" of "a yong man withovgten a wyfe" (l.3) the speaker is indirectly protesting against marriage. The poet expects his audience to realize this message implicitly, however. His technique is far more sophisticated than that of the earlier poets working

with this genre who addressed the audience directly and explicitly told them what to think. This poet relies on a more sophisticated audience, one who need not have everything spelled out in black and white but instead shares an implicit understanding with the poet. Even the authors of functional verse, then, come to see more in this particular genre than just its straightforward advisory function; in remaking this genre, they endow it with artistic or literary, rather than just merely practical, merit.

The fifteenth-century poets too take the process we noted in the Harley lyrics--that of reshaping our assumptions based on continental conventions--one step further as well. The Harley poets played with our expectations in a subtle way; the fifteenth-century poets are far more direct. Consider, for instance, the speaker of "In Praise of Brunettes" (33). She assumes right off that her audience is quite familiar with the courtly love conventions of the continent; whereas the audience's familiarity with continental conventions adds a power to the Harley lyrics, this familiarity is not absolutely necessary. The Harley lyrics would work even without such a knowledgeable audience. The fifteenth-century poem, however, demands a background knowledge from its audience. The speaker works directly off of this knowledge--her entire speech is a defense of brunettes against those men (i.e., the troubadours, trouvères, and their English followers) who praise blonde ladies so exclusively. She begins by saying that she has no lack of lovers though she "may not be so wyte as thou" (l.4). She then goes on to prove the value of the color "blac": she and "many mo" (l.6) believe it a "good" color (l.5); unlike white, it cannot be stained by "wynd and watur" (l.13); and, finally, she asks us to consider the value of black pepper, which is full of flavor (l.17-20). Her

lengthy and heated defense of the color black in general and of brunette women specifically would be somewhat bewildering to us had we no prior knowledge of the conventions of courtly love. The speaker bases her poem on the assumption that we are familiar with such conventions; she, like the poets of "A Henpecked Husband's Complaint,II" and "A Carefree Life," assumes a more sophisticated audience for her poem.

The speaker of "A Mocking Song of Love" (37) assumes exactly the same things. His whole poem is an outright mockery of the lament of the courtly lover. He begins in traditional fashion, saying "I am sory for her sake" (l.1), but confounds convention in the next line with the observation that notwithstanding his sorrow he "may wel ete and drynke." When he sleeps he cannot wake, he says, "so muche on here yc thenke" (l.4). And he is "brout in suche a bale" (l.5) that when he rises from bed he "listes wel to dyne" (l.8), or to drink "rythe god wyne" (l.11) when he has it. The power of this poem rests in the ironic tension it creates in our minds; from the first line, we are set up to expect a conventional love lament. The next two lines are traditional in that the speaker describes the extent of his sorrow in terms of his everyday behavior at meal and bedtimes, but his actual behavior is in direct opposition to that of the conventional sorrowing lover. He thinks of his lady at all times, so much so that he sleeps soundly at night and eats heartily during the day!

The irony that so delights us in this poem would not exist if we were not so familiar with continental conventions. And each line of the poem is carefully placed so as to intensify the irony as much as possible: in the first stanza, we are set up in the first line; the next two lines topple our expectations only to set them up again in the last line. The next two stanzas create a suspense before unloosing the irony: in each

stanza, the first two lines conform to convention by telling us how dire the narrator's situation has become. We wait to hear just how grave the matter is, but what we discover is again contrary to our expectations. The poem continually leads us into making certain assumptions and then quickly shatters them. The poet's expertise in playing with his audience in such fashion assumes again that this audience is not only knowledgeable in terms of conventions and poetry, but also willing to enter into the conspiracy of mocking these conventions with him. If we do not conspire with the poet--realize, that is, the irony that shapes his poem--the poem becomes trivial and even incomprehensible to us. The fifteenth-century poets we have studied so far, then, demand much more from their audiences than did even the Harley poets of the preceding century. In further developing the new interests or awarenesses that we saw come vaguely into being in the century before, the fifteenth-century poets begin to assume a more receptive or sophisticated audience than the one of the past--the one exception being, of course, Chaucer.

While Chaucer's genius can for the most part be reconciled with all our neat generalizations about the fourteenth century, the machinery does break down at this point. Chaucer stands far apart from his contemporaries in terms of demands made from and assumptions made about his audience. Consider his poem "To Rosamond,"[2] for instance. The poem is ostensibly a lament for a disdainful mistress in the courtly love tradition; as Talbot Donaldson points out, however, there is a mocking irony underlying the whole poem. This irony is not apparent right at first; the narrator starts off conventionally enough with a hyperbolic summary of his lady's beauty. She is the fairest creature on earth (l.1-2), her cheeks are like rubies (l.4), and her dancing is an ointment for the speaker's painful wounds of

love (1.6-7). The hyperbole is brought up short, however, in the next stanza, when the narrator describes the volume of his tears in terms of "crying tubfuls" (1.9). But even more outrageous is his description of himself "walwed and ywounde" (1.18) in love as a pike is rolled in galantine sauce (1.17). The contrast in tone between his conventional hyperbolic statements on the one hand, and these rather flatfooted--indeed grotesque--images on the other produces an irony much like the one we have been observing in the fifteenth-century lyrics.

Like these later lyricists, Chaucer relies upon our knowledge of the courtly love conventions developed on the continent to make his poem work. The utter inconguity that exists between the speaker as he is ostensibly--an eloquent and despairing courtly lover--and the speaker as he is in actuality--some clumsy country fellow feebly trying to make a go of it as a courtly lover--comes about solely as a result of our knowledge of these conventions. To experience in full the irony inherent in such startling juxtapositions as

> Was nevere pik walwed in galauntine
> As I in love am walwed and ywounde
> For which ful ofte I of myself divine
> That I am trewe Tristam the secounde,
> (1.17-20)

we must be familiar with a tradition that has gone before. And Chaucer relies upon us to read between the lines in this way; he knows we will be startled by the narrator's outrageous clumsiness, but he asks too that we go further and find out why.

Chaucer is better allied with the poets of the fifteenth century, then, in that he, like them, assumes a sophisticated audience in creating his poems. This increased audience-awareness, though, is not all that distinguishes the fifteenth century from the century that preceded it; in

the fifteenth century, the possibilities of language are explored more fully as well.

The bawdy double entendre of "In My Lady's Chamber" (31) is typical of many of the poems of this century. The poem moves on two different levels: first, as a straight bit of precautionary advice to the mistress of a large house; and second, as a playfully bawdy celebration of sex. And as we have seen before, the poet expects us to make the shift to the second level of interpretation on our own. He assumes his audience will grasp the double entendre early on, for if they do not, the poem, like some of the others we have seen so far, becomes pointless and unintelligible.

This particular poem is quite good despite its, albeit humorous, rather simplistic mode of operation. The double entendre is simple and explicit; the "tent of xv ynche" (l.3,12,21) does not remain ambiguous for long, but shows its true colors as the poet describes its ability to "gyuef such bogges/bytwyne my lady legges" (l.7-8), "gyveth such swappes/ under my lady lappes" (l.16-17), and "maketh such suyes/bytuynne my lady thyes" (l.25-26). More subtle, however, is the way in which the poet prefaces his poem's rather rough joke. The first two lines of each stanza are uttered in what seems to be earnest sincerity: "may no man slepe in youre halle/for dogges, madame--for dogges, madame" (l.1-2). The speaker presents himself as an honest and eager profferer of advice. He repeats the reason men should be barred from the lady's hall--"for dogges, madame, for dogges"--almost as if the lady had indeed raised her eyebrows at his speech. Earnestly he reiterates his point--only to shock the lady still more by his description of the weapon sleepers in the hall should carry. As he sees the disapproval in the lady's face, he retreats a bit and tries to smooth things over: the men should carry a probe with "twey clogges" (l.4)

only in order "to dryve awey the dogges, madame" (l.5), he insists. This same hurried retreat is made still again, in the last line of each stanza, when the speaker once more falls back on his original proposition and insists that all he has urged has been solely for the sake of driving away the dogs, rats, or flies which infest the hall. This advance and retreat serves to make the bawdy references in the poem less rough, less cut-and-dried, somehow; the speaker's guise of naive innocence and sincerity, upon which he repeatedly insists, makes his speech something more than a mere dirty joke. He plays with words, certainly, but he does something more as well: he plays too with our reactions--alternately shocking and then placating the more prudish members of his audience. Again, then, we see the creation of a rapport between author and audience based on a new consciousness, on the author's part, of his audience's attitudes and expectations.

Poems like "The Minstel and His Wares" (7), "The Wily Clerk" (24), and "Jolly Jankin" (27) work in much the same way. In each case, the language used sets up a suspense in the reader's mind. "The Minstrel and His Wares" creates this suspense by means of double entendres; the speaker, a peddler of sorts, urges a "damsele" (l.4) to buy some of his wares, namely a "poket" holding "tweyne precyous stonys" (l.5-6), a "Ielyf" that can stand "withoutyn fyt" and smite without hands (l.9-11), and a "powder" that "makit maydenys wombys to swelle" (l.13-15). As in "In My Lady's Chamber," the speaker of this poem creates a disguise for himself in which he can legitimately make indecent suggestions to ladies. Thus again a tension is produced by not only the bawdy double nature of the speaker's words, but also by the clever double role he establishes for himself. The poem's appeal rests, then, as we have seen before, in its

humor and guile as well as in its ingenuity. Easy enough for a man to get us to laugh at a risqué story, but far better, far more clever, to surprise us in this more subtle way.

"The Wily Clerk" and "Jolly Jankin" are sexually suggestive in both outright and subtle fashion as well. Their subtlety lies not in double entendre or disguise-making, however, but rather in the suspense they create by withholding key information till the very end. In the first poem, a maiden tells of her deception by a wily clerk. She believes "he cowd of gramery" (l.5) and promises that she shall "now telle . . . wy" (l.6). She delays a little longer, though, and it is not until l.11, when she says that "now wyll not my gyrdyl met," that we know for sure just what she is talking about. She keeps us in suspense for three stanzas before finally enlightening us as to the precise nature of her downfall. In this way, she makes a commonplace story new and interesting. Although she is relating a confession about herself, her attention is in actuality upon her audience. A maiden's seduction is old hat, but this particular maiden's way of telling about it is certainly not.

This manipulation of the audience, drawing us into her story by means of suspense, characterizes the speaker's method in "Jolly Jankin" to an even greater extent. Like the girl in "The Wily Clerk," the speaker of "Jolly Jankin" does not tell us of her seduction by Jankin, the clerk, until the very end of the poem. For seven stanzas, she describes Jankin's talents: he can sing (l.2,10,13), orate (l.4,7), and conduct himself with ceremony (l.16) at mass. He seems a devout man, as the maiden emphasizes when she says she receives inspiration from him—when he chants the Kyrie Eleison and Sanctus, or reads the Epistle, she feels "it dos me good" (l.5,8,11). Of course, at the poem's end we realize the true nature of both Jankin's

devotion and the maiden's inspiration ("Alas," she says, "I go with schylde," l.20), but even before then we are given hints as to the contrast existing here between appearance and reality. For one thing, the mere fact of the clerk's name, Jankin, would have identified him immediately to a medieval audience as the stock clerical seducer so common in the literature of the time.[3] Even more blatant perversions of the religious metaphor that frames the poem, however, are the pun on the maiden's name, Aleyson, in the refrain taken from the mass,[4] and Jankin's surreptitious pressing of Aleyson's foot during the recitation of the Sanctus (l.16-17). Of course, the poem's last lines carry this mix-up of religious and secular diction to an extreme, as Aleyson prefaces her confession of pregnancy with words taken, again, from the service of the mass:

> Benedicamus domino, cryst fro shame me schylde.
> Deo gracias therto--alas, I go with schylde!
> Kyrieleyson.
>
> (l.19-21)

The contrast between appearance and reality--the poem is apparently about a Christmas mass but is really about a young woman's seduction--is one of the ways in which the poem works, but too, like "The Wily Clerk," "Jolly Jankin" relies for part of its effect on suspense. We are given foreshadowings of the admission Aleyson finally makes, but the concrete fact is withheld till the poem's end. And the two devices, the contrast between appearance and reality and the suspenseful withholding of vital facts, both delight as well as confound us. The impropriety of the religious framework is clever but at the same time almost sacrilegious; and Jankin's real intentions are humorously wily but at the same time sinister. The dual tone which pervades this poem makes it the distinctive work it is. Aleyson's description of her downfall is undeniably funny,

but too we are never allowed to forget the sinister aspect of Jankin's crafty maneuverings. Aleyson sings her refrain, "Kyrieleyson," in the spirit of wittiness and fun, undeniably, but there is too a trace of cynicism in her voice; cynicism directed perhaps towards a God who allows such things to happen. "Kyrieleyson"--"Lord, have mercy"--she asks, and we cannot help but feel she intends more than just a witty pun by the line.

The power of language, then, becomes an important consideration for the poets of the fifteenth century. So far we have seen this development in the popular lyricists of this century; we turn now to the poets of courtly lyrics. The courtly poets' increased awareness of the possibilities of language shows itself most obviously in their adoption of aureate diction. This style, in moderation, might have made for some interesting poetry; unfortunately, the courtly poets for the most part drastically overused this new technique. Consider Charles d'Orleans' "Loyalty to His Mistress" (182). The sense of his poem is obliterated under a blanket of sophisticated language. He might as well have strung together a series of nonsense words, so void is his poem of any meaning or interest. The emotion he tries to convey is cheapened, made phony, by its expression; because Charles himself lessens the importance of what he says for the sake of how he says it, we too are forced to pay more heed to the mechanical, technical aspects of his poem. And a good poem must be more than a pretty piece of decoration; first must come that quality--that naked, unadorned sensible core or essence, call it truth, beauty, sincerity, or whatever--that arrests us, that causes that gut reaction described in the last chapter. If this quality, ambiguous as it is, is present, decorations and frills can certainly heighten it for us.

Decoration alone can never replace that essential core, however, a lesson that Charles d'Orleans would have done well to learn.[5]

Since further examples of this overattention to technique or style pervade this period, we will take note of only the most glaring. For example, the speaker of "Sweet Enslavement" (132) ostensibly wants to impress us with the depth of his love for his mistress. He says that

> Nowthir for joy, nor scherp aduersitie,
> nor for disdane, dreid, danger, nor dispair
> ffor lyfe, for deth, for wo, for destany,
> ffor bliss, for baill, for confort, nor for cair,
> for chance of fortoun turnand heir and thair,
> fro hir sall nevir turne my plane hairt trew.
> (1.8-13)

This list does not convey his emotion, however; rather, it conveys his delight in words. Why did he use four words--"disdane, dreid, danger, dispair"--when only one would suffice? indeed, when any more than one would, in fact, detract from what he is trying to say? And look at the way he goes about describing a phenomenon so conventional, so well-known, that a mere one-phrase allusion would suggest it in its entirety to us:

> The figurat dairt Invennomit with bliss,
> forgit with lufe and fedderit with delyt,
> Withowttin wame hes wondit me, I-wiss;
> The harme of quhilk will nevir moir be quyt,
> quhois grundin point vnto my hairt did wryt
> Into my mynd evir In remenbrans
> Off lufe and trewth with lang continwans.
> (1.43-49)

Here is the most clear and direct evidence of this kind of poetic cheating; everyone knew and knows about the old eye-heart mechanism--there was absolutely no need for the poet to embellish it so. The speaker wastes our time--he deceives or cheats us--for the sake of showing off his own vocabulary and supposed skill. He has not written a good poem; he has not even created a nice piece of decoration. He has merely bored us.

The list of courtly poets who do the same goes on and on; rather than elaborating upon the various means by which each wastes our time, however, we would do better to turn now to the few really good poets who have discerned the difference between and placed the proper value upon sense (what is being said; the core of sensibility that arrests us in a good poem) and style (how it is being said; the decorative devices that accentuate the sensible core). "Love's Sorrow" (165) is written in the high style, with elegant diction. What sets it apart from the poems we have been discussing is the emotion it too evokes. The speaker, probably a despairing lover, describes the kind of life he leads: "this ys no lyf, alas, that y do lede/it is but deth" (l.1-2). His comparison is apt, to the point, and as a result, moving. His sorrow is great, but instead of telling us by means of many similes just exactly how great, he leaves it to our imagination--he says merely that he is "past all despeyre and owte of all gladenesse" (l.4). "Nothyng may comforte [me] nor amende," he says, "tyl deith come forthe and make of me an ende" (l.6-7). His language belongs to the high style, but it does not get the better of his feelings. Despite its aristocratic diction, the poem is a masterpiece of understatement. The poet says just enough to make his poem arresting or intriguing. By leaving half of the creative process up to his audience--something we saw the popular poets doing almost all the time--he makes a good poem.

Ornate language does not detract from the appeal or power of a poem like "Presentation Verses with a Ring" (95), either. The speaker addresses a ring he is sending to his sweetheart, commanding that it "knell doune at hyr ffete" (l.3) and beseech her to place it upon her finger. So far, the image is elaborate and a bit ridiculous. The poem's last

line, however, justifies the high-flown, pompous talk that has gone before. "Say boldly," the narrator charges the ring, " [that] my masster wold that he wer I" (1.6-7). The sharp, succinctly understated force of this last line gives the poem all its power; these last simple words serve not only to maintain the integrity or consistency of the image that shapes the poem throughout, but also to evoke completely the full force of the speaker's emotion. Instead of boring us with a monotonously conventional recitation of every detail comprising the "depth" of his love, the poet here chooses to suggest, to hint. He wishes he could be the ring upon his lady's finger; what more need be said? Certainly his idea is not new--presentation verses of this sort are quite conventional. His manner of dealing with this conventional matter, though, is striking. Like a few of his contemporaries, he has managed to work with ornate language and still keep an eye on what it is he wants to say with it; he masters the tool rather than lets the tool master him.

The best example of the sensible use of courtly language appears in "The Clerk and the Husbandman" (181). This lyric is written in the conventional format of the debate poem. As is traditional, a clerk and a husbandman argue about the value of women and love. The poet has made an interesting addition, however, in that he has the two debaters argue in elegant language. And rather than detract from the spirit of their conversation, the diction instead enhances it. In some ways, the high style ennobles their debate, makes it seem more scholarly and well-founded. This effect, although it may not always be justified, seems to be the natural result of a learned vocabulary and rhetorical skill.

The high style too, though, at times serves an opposite purpose; the polysyllabic rhyme of "recreacion" and "comynycacion" (11.1,3), for example,

has a comical rather than serious effect on the tone of the poem. The rhyme lends a singsong lightness to the words' impact, as if the poet wrote them with tongue-in-cheek. And although both debaters speak reasonably and well, the conflict between them adds as well to the comic nature of the poem. In stanza one, the clerk laments the sufferings of love. In the next stanza, the husbandman, "wenyng to corekt hys insolens" (l.10), advocates a spurning of women altogether, or, as he puts it, the clerk must "turn vp hyr haltur and let hyr goe" (l.16). The framework is thus set up for the rest of the poem; the clerk insists that women are good and true and made especially for men by the hand of God. He ends each of his speeches with the words "Quia amore languio." The husbandman, by contrast, thinks the clerk a fool and argues that women are false, fickle, and best avoided. He in turn ends each of his speeches with the words "turn vpe hyr haltur and let hyr goe." Although each speaker is quite earnest and outspoken in his opinion, neither has the slightest influence on the other. The clerk keeps saying "quia amore languio" and the husbandman "turn vpe hyr haltur and let hyr goe!" The debate becomes a merry farce; neither speaker seems even to have heard the other. The scene the poet creates is hilarious--a common clerk and an even commoner husbandman argue intently with grand eloquence, but neither makes the smallest dent on the other's consciousness. Thus the high style in language is here a major component of this particular poem's goodness or merit.

Grand language works in the same way in "Dayly in Englond meruels be fownd," (407) in Greene's collection of carols.[6] This poem describes the unnatural turn of events since God's creation of Adam and Eve which has led to women's domination over men. In England as in "euery nacion" (l.22), women presume too much. They take charge and order their husbands around,

even cuckold them, which causes great strife and altercation in both "borows and townys" (1.15). The poem's theme is humorous enough; it traces the history of the master's loss of the "brych" since the Creation, with examples drawn from the Bible, mythology, and ancient history. But it is above all the language which creates the real comedy of the poem. The use of such sophisticated diction and analogy in discussing familial squabbles is incongruous; this incongruity, along with, again, the tongue-in-cheek humor created by polysyllabic rhyme, makes the poem a masterpiece of comic wit.

Just as the fifteenth-century poets tend at times to overwork courtly language, so too do they tend to overwork courtly thematic conventions. Poems like "A Catalogue of Delights" (127) or "The Beauty of His Mistress, I" (128), typical courtly love laments, conform to convention in every way. The speaker of "A Catalogue of Delights" makes a rote recitation of his sorrow and his mistress' indifference to him, and then lists in routine fashion her various charms, both in character and in appearance. The speaker of "The Beauty of His Mistress, I" also describes his sorrow and his lady's beauty in conventional fashion. His list is even more monotonous than the other speaker's, however; this second narrator sounds like a broken record as he keeps reiterating the fact that his mistress' "fygure" is both "fresche" and "fayre." Now, making use of conventional formats is not necessarily a bad thing; we saw, for instance, how the Harley poets' reliance on our familiarity with continental conventions made for excellent poetry. But there are two ways to "make use of" convention: in the first, one adheres to it strictly, saying no more and no less than what has been said before; in the second, one takes advantage of it, reworking or adapting convention to fit one's own individual purposes. Poets who use convention in the first way doom themselves and their poetry to stale, trite mediocrity.

They say only what has been said many times before; unthinking, unprovoking rote recitation comprises all there is to the spirit or power of their poetry. On the other hand, poets who use convention in the second way, reworking it, that is, to their own advantage, create something new and dynamic every time they write. This is the value of convention; alone it forms a narrow mainstream of pattern, but from this mainstream branch various related yet ever new, ever fresh bywaters.

Just as we discovered with the interest in language which marks this period, there are as many bad as good examples of the ways in which the fifteenth-century poets make use of conventional ideas. "Gracious and Gay" (143) is conventional in the sense that the speaker laments his lady's pitilessness and praises her physical charms. He keeps these elements at a minimum, however. He is as brief and concise as possible: he is grieved, but short-winded about it ("butt sche rew on me today/to deth sche hatt me broth," 1.3-4); he thinks his lady beautiful, but does not get carried away in his description of her ("hyr feyngerys bytt long and small/hyr harmus byth rown and toth/hyr mowth as sweth as lycory," 1.5-7). The speaker restrains conventional formulas to a minimum, then. He too branches off from them, as we see in the last stanza. Even if we feel that, in the previous stanzas, it is convention rather than the lover speaking, no one can deny that it is the speaker's voice alone that is heard in the final stanza. In a heartfelt outburst of emotion, he addresses his lady:

> To the my low ys lend;
> Kysse me yn my way,
> Onys ar y wend.
> (1.18-20)

"Just one kiss before I go and hinder you no more," he cries. Clearly, the narrator is here speaking for himself and from himself, not the

institution of convention. Whereas he may have seemed the typical cardboard courtly lover defined by convention in the earlier stanzas of the poem, he becomes poignantly human, evoking our sympathy, in the last stanza.

A similar process is at work in another poem, "The Power of Love" (162). The speaker appears in a traditional role as an unrequited lover "slayn wyth dart of loue" (l.2) for the first two stanzas of the poem. In the last stanza, however, he is rounded out. He becomes a real person, capable of touching us, making us sympathize with his plight, when he says

> wherewyth schall y me defende
> for y haue nothere gamyn ne gle?
> We may not speke but we be schent,
> yette wyll y loue you pruvyly.
> (l.21-24)

His determination to love his mistress "pruvyly" or inwardly, even though no outward kind of love will ever exist between them, makes the speaker seem a real person rather than a cardboard type bound by convention. It is because of this that the poem becomes for us something more than a neat, regular, consistent, technical construction. Mere conventional ideas, like ornate language, as well-dressed and technically perfect as they may be, can never be any more for us than pretty pieces of decoration. Good poetry, as we have discovered so many times before, demands something more than an attractive façade.

And as far as convention goes, we have found that the second way of using it, reworking it, that is, to suit one's own purposes, makes for good poetry. We noted too that the Harley poets were our most obvious evidence for this conclusion. While the poets we have just been discussing were reworking convention, they were not doing it in such explicit or obvious fashion as the Harley poets did. Rather, they tended to follow

the set patterns of convention for the first part of their poems, and then break away from this pattern at the end in a burst of personal inspiration. In each case, the speakers were transformed from cardboard types to living, breathing, grieving human beings. In at least two fifteenth-century lyrics, though, the poets have used convention in a manner similar to that of the Harley poets as well as to that of some of the popular poets we studied earlier in this chapter. Consider, for instance, how convention is used in "A Song of Scorn" (174). The speaker expresses a great love for his lady ("I love you verryly at my too," l.5), but elaborates upon it in a manner similar to the speaker's in "A Mocking Song of Love" (37). He takes conventional formulas and turns them around--"Welcome be ye when ye goo," he says, "and farewel when ye come!" (l.1-2). "And whan ye be ovth fare/I pray for yow sertayn/that neuer man, horsse, ne mare/ brynge yow to town ageyn" (l.9-12). As we have seen before, the speaker works with our expectations in this poem; he uses convention explicitly. He knows we assume certain things in accordance with it, and turns these assumptions around. In this way, he makes his poem novel and interesting in an innovative way.

Thomas Hoccleve works with convention in exactly the same way in his poem "Praise of His Lady" (210). Confident in his audience's familiarity with conventions, he sets out to write a very clever description of his mistress' beauty. Her forehead, he says, "is ful narw and smal" (l.2) and her "bowgy cheekes been as softe as clay" (l.5). Already we have been taken by surprise--the lady's features are somewhat at odds with the perfect conventional ones usually described. The comedy mounts, however, as Hoccleve goes on:

> Hir nose a pentice is that it ne shal
> Reyne in hir mowth thogh shee vprightes lay (l.11-12)

Hir mowth is nothyng scant with lippes gray
Hir chin unnethe may be seen at al
Hir comly body shape as a foot-bal.
(l.17-19)

He appears to be writing a straight praise of his lady's features, but his choice of words lets us in on his wit. Her nose, he says, is an overhanging roof that does not droop into her mouth though she stands upright. As for her mouth, it "is nothyng scant." His backhanded compliments are hilarious because they are written in accordance with conventional guidelines. The irony between how he writes his praise and what his praise consists of, however, makes us laugh. And even though the picture he creates of his beloved is funny in itself, we too laugh intellectually at the mockery Hoccleve makes of convention. As we discovered with their use of language, then, the poets of the fifteenth century do great things when they employ discretion in their use of conventional themes and images as well. Neither fancy words nor neat, pat, pre-formed ideas, elegant and impressive as they may appear to be, will ever substitute for the sensible core that is always the first criterion of good poetry. Mere style--in diction or in theme--can never make up for the lack of that sensible core inherent in good poetry, something Hoccleve and a few of his more successful peers seem to have realized.

The poets of the fifteenth century, then, for better and for worse, bring the vaguely defined tendencies of the previous century to a head. Functional "advice" verse comes to encompass more than the strictly admonitory function given it in times past; the possibilities of language are explored to a sometimes ill-advised extent; and the handy stock grab bag of conventional ideas and images is dipped into with the intention both to imitate and, what is better, remold. There are as

many bad as good examples of the ways in which these later poets developed and expanded the heritage of their predecessors, but these mixed results are part of the risk the daring explorer of new, unmapped territories must undertake. It is inevitable that the adventurer, be he fifteenth-century new world explorer or fifteenth-century poet, discover the good with the bad in his travels. And the chance of uncovering the good is with the risk of as well uncovering the bad, as the more notable lyrics of this century attest.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1]Rossell H. Robbins, ed., Secular Lyrics of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 37. Although I have relied on Maxwell Luria and Richard Hoffman, Middle English Lyrics (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1974) for textual glosses, all citations from fifteenth-century lyrics are henceforth from Robbins' edition unless otherwise noted, and follow his titles and lyric rather than page numbers.

[2]M.H. Abrams, ed., The Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1968), Vol I, p. 213.

[3]Richard L. Greene, The Early English Carols (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 452.

[4]Robbins, p. 235.

[5]Not that he did not at some point--his poem "A Confession of Love" (185) exhibits a sophistication in style that enhances rather than substitutes for what I have termed a "sensible core." In this poem, Charles works by understatment. His speaker poses as a repentant sinner who confesses to his "gostly fadir" (l.11) that he has stolen "a cosse of gret swetnes" (l.4), for which he asks forgiveness. The speaker maintains this confessional framework throughout his poem, but when he suggests the manner of his penance we realize that the framework is only a facade. To rectify his theft, the speaker vows to restore the kiss again. This peoposition, followed and concealed as it were by the ritualistic refrain ("My gostly fadir, y me confesse/First to god and then to yow"), takes a moment to sink in; when it finally does, however, the doubletake is delightful. Suffice it to say, Charles was capable of good writing.

[6]Greene, p. 272.

CHAPTER IV

Epilogue

We took a "look back," so to speak, in the first chapter of this paper; it seems appropriate, now, to come full circle and once again look back at where we have been. This thesis throughout has concentrated itself around two interrelated centers of interest: one focus has been a more concrete, historical one, and the other has been a more intangible, aesthetic one. We have been interested in both the overall development in terms of convention of Middle English love lyrics as a whole, and the unique qualities or essence which adhere to each lyric individually. Of course, these two foci are not as separate as they may appear by definition to be. Our historical interest continually intrudes upon, interacts with, our aesthetic one, and vice versa. We cannot escape this dual awareness as we experience poetry or indeed any work of art.

Our historical study of the development of the Middle English love lyric, granted the fact that this study by necessity incorporated aspects of our aesthetic one, encompassed four centuries; we traced the evolution of technique and idea in medieval love poetry from the Goliards, troubadours, and trouvères of the twelfth century through the later English poets of the fifteenth. We looked at conventions that were established on the continent in the twelfth century and observed how these conventions were maintained or reworked in the hands of the English poets of the next few centuries.

Concerning "convention" in a more general sense, as an entity in and of itself, we saw both its good and bad sides: a thoughtful poet does not scorn but rather takes advantage of the experience and heritage of his forebears, makes discreet use of the tradition available to him, and

in this way assures himself of a solid, steady foundation for the poem he wishes to write. A rash poet, on the other hand, relies too heavily upon the free gifts of tradition, capitalizes to a fault on the experiences of those who went before him, and in this way risks creating, or rather uncreating, if you will, a stillborn, lifeless succession of mere words. This double face of convention has been aptly described by Christopher Ricks in his book Poems and Critics. "We ask of a work of literature," he says, "that it be both natural and novel;"

> Natural, in the sense that it will relate recognizably to the world . . . and novel, in that it will do so in some new way.[1]

A poem, as we have discovered, that is too "natural" or too strictly imitative of convention is dull and shallow no matter how pleasingly elegant or fancy its outward dress. And although it is true that in our particular selection of medieval lyrics we did not come across any examples of the converse of this observation, that a poem that is too "novel" or too experimental, too far beyond the reach of its audience's experience, becomes unintelligible and worthless, our experience with more modern literature (or art or drama, for that matter) certainly confirms the veracity of this converse observation as well. The best literature, indeed the best art, exhibits a dynamic balance between the two polar extremes of convention that Ricks describes, as our study of Middle English love lyrics has shown. No poet anywhere can write outside of convention, as is evidenced most clearly in the medieval poetry we have considered; the best poets, though, as we too have discovered, do not accept convention at face value. They continually modify or expand its dictates, adapting them to suit their own individual needs and purposes. And it is this confluence of the natural with the novel that distinguishes

a good poem and denotes a great poet.

Our historical interest, then, in the trends and developments that come to light in our selected body of poetry over the course of four centuries concerns convention, both in a specific and a more general sense. Included in this large interest in the evolution of tradition, of course, is a more pointed one, having to do with the ways in which four centuries of medieval poets thought about love. To the Goliards, love was as natural, inevitable, and wholesome as the changing of the seasons. The troubadours, by contrast, were more in awe of love, viewing it in a refined and stylized way as a godlike, supernatural impossibility. Like the troubadours, the trouvères supported a "courtly" variety of love, although the later trouvères combined this remote, refined, stylized view with a more personal one, in which they described their own feelings about and experiences in love in an individual, subjective, moving way by means of figurative language. In England, the thirteenth-century poets emphasized the paradoxical unnaturalness of being in love, the discord love produces between man and his surroundings. The fourteenth-century popular poets depicted an almost mystical kind of love in their symbolic poems and a devastatingly painful kind in their realistic ones; the courtly poets fluctuated between a sincere portrayal of this kind of devastating love (in their poems written in a less formal style) and an artificial one (in their poems written in the courtly love tradition in the high style). The Harley poets wrote, too, about love's ability to produce unnatural states in its human subject according to the tradition of courtly love. In the fifteenth century, the popular poets painted a cynical, earthy picture of love at its roughest while the courtly poets wrote about love, again, in its most idealized and refined implications.

Although I make the following distinction somewhat guardedly, because it is a generalization and no group of poets that we studied conforms as a whole to either of its tenets, it does seem that love as it is described in the poetry we considered takes on one or the other of the following characteristics: either the poet portrays it as a gratuitous, benevolent gift, amiable to man (as, in general, the Goliards and the English popular "symbolist" and to some extent the Harley poets of the fourteenth century present it), or as a hostile, malevolent force, inimical to man (as depicted by the troubadours or trouvères, or to some extent the English Harley poets and the courtly love lyricists of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries). Of course, in actuality--that is, in specific poems--aspects of both these polar conceptions of love can be seen; still, it is useful to make even such guarded generalizations if it can aid us in seeing the large movements or evolutions in thought that are often obscured by the mass of detail and even contradiction that comprise them.

In the history of ideas (or perhaps the history of sentiment), love as it was described by the Goliards in the twelfth century moves from a natural, inevitable, common experience to, in the troubadours first of all, a tortured, supernatural impossibility. Of course, the cynical conception of it held by the bawdy popular poets of fifteenth-century England seems to show love moving again towards naturalism--but remember the courtly poets of this same century were still adhering to <u>amour courtois</u> in all its unnaturalness and impossibility. The stream of thought we call the history of ideas, though, never runs a smooth or rigidly outlined course; this does not mean we should dismiss it as a tool or a discipline. The history of ideas, concerned as it is with all the progressions, regressions,

and, yes, even vacillations in the thinking of the men and women of times before our own, is still one of the most interesting ways of looking at the world as it was, and one of the most useful in looking at it as it is and may be in times yet to come.

Finally, another more specific part of our large interest in the evolution of tradition is the development of the poetic consciousness. As we have seen, the trouvères were the first poets to yield less to the expectations and assumptions of their audiences and incorporate more of their own personal experience and thought in the poems they wrote. This tendency towards subjectivity becomes more and more pronounced as we move across the channel to England and note what the fourteenth and fifteenth-century poets there did with language and conventional themes and ideas. This increasing awareness of language and its implied increase in the poet's awareness of and concession to his own imagination reaches its apex in the conceits developed by the English poets of the Renaissance and even goes beyond with the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century. Again, our historical interest allows us to see these large movements. In this thesis, as we turned to examine things more abstract and aesthetic, we turned, too, away from a grasp of large movements and towards an understanding of quintessential subtleties.

This shift in interest forced us to descend, so to speak, from the vantage point we attain by history and hindsight to the matter, forever the same throughout history, which makes up each individual lyric. The process by which we follow through with our historical interest in these lyrics is one which is rooted in time; by virtue of the fact that a large block of time has passed since these poems were written, we are able to see

large movements, evolutions, in certain areas of their development. The process by which we satisfy our aesthetic interest in these lyrics, however, is one which stands in some respects outside of time; a good poem strikes us in a primal and explosive way. Although it is true that a historical awareness can work hand in hand with, even enhance, this aesthetic one, in examining the way in which good poetry works, we are interested in hardly perceptible quintessences, not in large expansive overviews. One cannot generalize, that is make overviews, about what makes poetry in general good; one can only talk about particular poems and what factors, unique to each specific poem, are responsible for its goodness. Thus "sincerity," or "homeliness," or "spareness of expression," or "tension" mean something only as they are applied to specific works. In and of themselves they are neither good nor bad and have no implications for poetry in general. The only generalization we can make about the way good poetry works is to say that somehow and in some way it strikes us. All good poems share this characteristic, but, as we discovered throughout this study, beyond this generalization we cannot go.

FOOTNOTES TO EPILOGUE

[1]Christopher Ricks, Poems and Critics (New York: Harper and Row,1972), pp. 15-16.

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